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WILFRID CUMBERMEDE.

VOL. III.

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# WILFRID CUMBERMEDE

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"ROBERT FALCONER," "DAVID ELGINBROD,"
"ALEC FORBES OF HOWGLEN,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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# WILFRID CUMBERMEDE.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE SWORD IN THE SCALE.

THE next morning Charley and I went as usual to the library, where, later in the day, we were joined by the two ladies. It was long before our eyes once met, but when at last they did, Mary allowed hers to rest on mine for just one moment with an expression of dove-like beseeching, which I dared to interpret as meaning—"Be just to me." If she read mine, surely she read there that she was safe with my thoughts as with those of her mother.

Charley and I worked late in the afternoon, and went away in the last of the twilight. As we approached the gate of the park, however, I

remembered I had left behind me a book I had intended to carry home for comparison with a copy in my possession, of which the title-page was gone. I asked Charley, therefore, to walk on and give my man some directions about Lilith, seeing I had it in my mind to propose a ride on the morrow, while I went back to fetch it.

Finding the door at the foot of the stair leading to the open gallery ajar, and knowing that none of the rooms at either end of it were occupied, I went the nearest way, and thus entered the library at the point furthest from the more public parts of the house. The book I sought was, however, at the other end of the suite, for I had laid it on the window-sill of the room next the armoury.

As I entered that room, and while I crossed it towards the glimmering window, I heard voices in the armoury, and soon distinguished Clara's. It never entered my mind that possibly I ought not to hear what might be said. Just as I reached the window I was arrested, and stood stock still: the other voice was that of Geoffrey

Brotherton. Before my self-possession returned, I had heard what follows.

"I am certain *he* took it," said Clara. "I didn't see him, of course; but if you call at the Moat to-morrow, ten to one you will find it hanging on the wall."

"I knew him for a sneak, but never took him for a thief. I would have lost anything out of the house rather than that sword!"

"Don't you mention my name in it. If you do, I shall think you—well, I will never speak to you again."

"And if I don't, what then?"

Before I heard her answer, I had come to myself. I had no time for indignation yet. I must meet Geoffrey at once. I would not, however, have him know I had overheard any of their talk. It would have been more straightforward to allow the fact to be understood, but I shrunk from giving him occasion for accusing me of an eavesdropping of which I was innocent. Besides, I had no wish to encounter Clara before I understood her game, which I need not say was a mystery to me. What end could she

have in such duplicity? I had had unpleasant suspicions of the truth of her nature before, but could never have suspected her of baseness.

I stepped quietly into the further room, whence I returned, making a noise with the door-handle, and saying,

"Are you there, Miss Coningham? Could you help me to find a book I left here?"

There was silence; but after the briefest pause I heard the sound of her dress as she swept hurriedly out into the gallery. I advanced. On the top of the steps, filling the doorway of the armoury in the faint light from the window, appeared the dim form of Brotherton.

"I beg your pardon," I said. "I heard a lady's voice, and thought it was Miss Coningham's."

"I cannot compliment your ear," he answered. "It was one of the maids. I had just rung for a light. I presume you are Mr. Cumbermede?"

"Yes," I answered. "I returned to fetch a book I forgot to take with me. I suppose you

have heard what we've been about in the library here?"

"I have been partially informed of it," he answered, stiffly. "But I have heard also that you contemplate a raid upon the armoury. I beg you will let the weapons alone."

I had said something of the sort to Clara that very morning.

"I have a special regard for them," he went on; "and I don't want them meddled with. It's not every one knows how to handle them. Some amongst them I would not have injured for their weight in diamonds. One in particular I should like to give you the history of—just to show you that I am right in being careful over them.—Here comes the light."

I presume it had been hurriedly arranged between them as Clara left him that she should send one of the maids, who in consequence now made her appearance with a candle. Brotherton took it from her and approached the wall.

"Why! What the devil! Some one has been meddling already, I find! The very

sword I speak of is gone! There's the sheath hanging empty! What *can* it mean? Do you know anything of this, Mr. Cumbermede?"

"I do, Mr. Brotherton. The sword to which that sheath belongs is *mine.* I have it."

"*Yours!*" he shouted; then restraining himself, added in a tone of utter contempt—"This is rather too much. Pray, sir, on what grounds do you lay claim to the smallest atom of property within these walls? My father ought to have known what he was about when he let you have the run of the house! And the old books, too! By heaven, it's too much! I always thought——"

"It matters little to me what you think, Mr. Brotherton—so little that I do not care to take any notice of your insolence——"

"Insolence!" he roared, striding towards me, as if he would have knocked me down.

I was not his match in strength, for he was at least two inches taller than I, and of a coarse-built, powerful frame. I caught a light rapier from the wall, and stood on my defence.

"Coward!" he cried.

"There are more where this came from," I answered, pointing to the wall.

He made no move towards arming himself, but stood glaring at me in a white rage.

"I am prepared to prove," I answered as calmly as I could, "that the sword to which you allude is mine. But I will give *you* no explanation. If you will oblige me by asking your father to join us, I will tell him the whole story."

"I will have a warrant out against you."

"As you please. I am obliged to you for mentioning it. I shall be ready. I have the sword, and intend to keep it. And by the way, I had better secure the scabbard as well," I added, as with a sudden spring I caught it also from the wall, and again stood prepared.

He ground his teeth with rage. He was one of those who, trusting to their superior strength, are not much afraid of a row, but cannot face cold steel: soldier as he had been, it made him nervous.

"Insulted in my own house!" he snarled from between his teeth.

"Your father's house," I corrected. "Call him, and I will give explanations."

"Damn your explanations! Get out of the house, you puppy; or I'll have the servants up, and have you ducked in the horse-pond."

"Bah!" I said. "There's not one of them would lay hands on me at your bidding. Call your father, I say, or I will go and find him myself."

He broke out in a succession of oaths, using language I had heard in the streets of London, but nowhere else. I stood perfectly still, and watchful. All at once he turned and went into the gallery, over the balustrade of which he shouted,

"Martin! Go and tell my father to come here—to the armoury—at once. Tell him there's a fellow here out of his mind."

I remained quiet, with my scabbard in one hand, and the rapier in the other—a dangerous weapon enough, for it was, though slight, as sharp as a needle, and I knew it for a bit of excellent temper. Brotherton stood outside wait-

ing for his father. In a few moments I heard the voice of the old man.

"Boys! boys!" he cried; "What is all this to do?"

"Why, sir," answered Geoffrey, trying to be calm, "here's that fellow Cumbermede confesses to have stolen the most valuable of the swords out of the armoury—one that's been in the family for two hundred years, and says he means to keep it."

I just caught the word *liar* ere it escaped my lips: I would spare the son in his father's presence.

"Tut! tut!" said Sir Giles. "What does it all mean? You're at your old quarrelsome tricks, my boy! Really you ought to be wiser by this time!"

As he spoke, he entered panting, and with the rubicund glow beginning to return upon a face from which the message had evidently banished it.

"Tut! tut!" he said again, half starting back as he caught sight of me with the weapon in my hand—"What is it all about, Mr. Cum-

bermede? I thought *you* had more sense!"

"Sir Giles," I said, "I have not confessed to having stolen the sword—only to having taken it."

"A very different thing," he returned, trying to laugh. "But come now; tell me all about it. We can't have quarrelling like this, you know. We can't have pot-house work here."

"That is just why I sent for you, Sir Giles," I answered, replacing the rapier on the wall. "I want to tell you the whole story."

"Let's have it, then."

"Mind, I don't believe a word of it," said Geoffrey.

"Hold your tongue, sir," said his father, sharply.

"Mr. Brotherton," I said, "I offered to tell the story to Sir Giles—not to you."

"You offered!" he sneered. "You may be compelled—under different circumstances by-and-by, if you don't mind what you're about."

"Come now—no more of this!" said Sir Giles.

Thereupon I began at the beginning, and

told him the story of the sword, as I have already given it to my reader. He fidgeted a little, but Geoffrey kept himself stock-still during the whole of the narrative. As soon as I had ended, Sir Giles said,

"And you think poor old Close actually carried off your sword!—Well, he was an odd creature, and had a passion for everything that could kill. The poor little atomy used to carry a poniard in the breast-pocket of his black coat —as if anybody would ever have thought of attacking his small carcass! Ha! ha! ha! He was simply a monomaniac in regard of swords and daggers. There, Geoffrey! The sword is plainly his. *He* is the wronged party in the matter, and we owe him an apology."

"I believe the whole to be a pure invention," said Geoffrey, who now appeared perfectly calm.

"Mr. Brotherton!" I began, but Sir Giles interposed.

"Hush! hush!" he said, and turned to his son. "My boy, you insult your father's guest."

"I will at once prove to you, sir, how un-

worthy he is of any forbearance, not to say protection from you. Excuse me for one moment."

He took up the candle, and opening the little door at the foot of the winding stair, disappeared. Sir Giles and I sat in silence and darkness until he returned, carrying in his hand an old vellum-bound book.

"I daresay you don't know this manuscript, sir," he said, turning to his father.

"I know nothing about it," answered Sir Giles. "What is it? Or what has it to do with the matter in hand?"

"Mr. Close found it in some corner or other, and used to read it to me when I was a little fellow. It is a description, and in most cases a history as well, of every weapon in the armoury. They had been much neglected, and a great many of the labels were gone, but those which were left referred to numbers in the book heading descriptions which corresponded exactly to the weapons on which they were found. With a little trouble he had succeeded in supplying the numbers where they were missing, for the descriptions are very minute."

He spoke in a tone of perfect self-possession.

"Well, Geoffrey, I ask again, what has all this to do with it?" said his father.

"If Mr. Cumbermede will allow you to look at the label attached to the sheath in his hand—for fortunately it was a rule with Mr. Close to put a label on both sword and sheath—and if you will read me the number, I will read you the description in the book."

I handed the sheath to Sir Giles, who began to decipher the number on the ivory ticket.

"The label is quite a new one," I said.

"I have already accounted for that," said Brotherton. "I will leave it to yourself to decide whether the description corresponds."

Sir Giles read out the number figure by figure, adding—

"But how are we to test the description? I don't know the thing, and it's not here."

"It is at the Moat," I replied; "but its future place is at Sir Giles's decision."

"Part of the description belongs to the scabbard you have in your hand, sir," said Brother-

ton. "The description of the sword itself I submit to Mr. Cumbermede."

"Till the other day I never saw the blade," I said.

"Likely enough," he retorted dryly, and proceeding, read the description of the half-basket hilt, inlaid with gold, and the broad blade, channeled near the hilt, and inlaid with ornaments and initials in gold.

"There is nothing in all that about the scabbard," said his father.

"Stop till we come to the history," he replied, and read on, as nearly as I can recall, to the following effect. I have never had an opportunity of copying the words themselves.

"'This sword seems to have been expressly forged for Sir —— ——,'" (He read it *Sir So and So.*) "'whose initials are to be found on the blade. According to tradition, it was worn by him, for the first and only time, at the battle of Naseby, where he fought in the cavalry led by Sir Marmaduke Langdale. From some accident or other, Sir —— —— found, just as the order to charge was given, that he could not draw his

sword, and had to charge with only a pistol in his hand. In the flight which followed he pulled up, and unbuckled his sword, but while attempting to ease it, a rush of the enemy startled him, and, looking about, he saw a Roundhead riding straight at Sir Marmaduke, who that moment passed in the rear of his retiring troops—giving some directions to an officer by his side, and unaware of the nearness of danger. Sir —— —— put spurs to his charger, rode at the trooper, and dealt him a downright blow on the pot-helmet with his sheathed weapon. The fellow tumbled from his horse, and Sir —— —— found his scabbard split halfway up, but the edge of his weapon unturned. It is said he vowed it should remained sheathed for ever.'—The person who has now unsheathed it has done a great wrong to the memory of a loyal cavalier."

"The sheath halfway split was as familiar to my eyes as the face of my uncle," I said, turning to Sir Giles. "And in the only reference I ever heard my great-grandmother make to it, she mentioned the name of Sir Marmaduke. I recollect that much perfectly."

"But how could the sword be there and here at one and the same time?" said Sir Giles.

"*That* I do not pretend to explain," I said.

"Here at least is written testimony to our possession of it," said Brotherton in a conclusive tone.

"How, then, are we to explain Mr. Cumbermede's story?" said Sir Giles, evidently in good faith.

"With that I cannot consent to allow myself concerned.—Mr. Cumbermede is, I am told, a writer of fiction."

"Geoffrey," said Sir Giles, "behave yourself like a gentleman."

"I endeavour to do so," he returned with a sneer.

I kept silence.

"How can you suppose," the old man went on, "that Mr. Cumbermede would invent such a story? What object could he have?"

"He may have a mania for weapons, like old Close—as well as for old books," he replied.

I thought of my precious folio. But I did not

yet know how much additional force his insinuation with regard to the motive of my labours in the library would gain if it should be discovered that such a volume was in my possession.

"You may have remarked, sir," he went on, "that I did not read the name of the owner of the sword in any place where it occurred in the manuscript."

"I did. And I beg to know why you kept it back," answered Sir Giles.

"What do you think the name might be, sir?"

"How should I know? I am not an antiquarian."

"Sir *Wilfrid Cumbermede.* You will find the initials on the blade.—Does that throw any light on the matter, do you think, sir?"

"Why, that is your very own name!" cried Sir Giles, turning to me.

I bowed.

"It is a pity the sword shouldn't be yours."

"It *is* mine, Sir Giles—though, as I said, I am prepared to abide by your decision."

"And now I remember"—the old man resumed, after a moment's thought—"the other evening Mr. Alderforge—a man of great learning, Mr. Cumbermede—told us that the name of Cumbermede had at one time belonged to our family. It is all very strange. I confess I am utterly bewildered."

"At least you can understand, sir, how a man of imagination, like Mr. Cumbermede here, might desire to possess himself of a weapon which bears his initials, and belonged two hundred years ago to a baronet of the same name as himself—a circumstance which, notwithstanding it is by no means a common name, is not *quite* so strange as at first sight appears—that is, if all reports are true."

I did not in the least understand his drift; neither did I care to inquire into it now.

"Were you aware of this, Mr. Cumbermede?" asked his father.

"No, Sir Giles," I answered.

"Mr. Cumbermede has had the run of the place for weeks. I am sorry I was not at home. This book was lying all the time on the

table in the room above, where poor old Close's work-bench and polishing-wheel are still standing."

"Mr. Brotherton, this gets beyond bearing," I cried. "Nothing but the presence of your father, to whom I am indebted for much kindness, protects you."

"Tut! tut!" said Sir Giles.

"Protects me, indeed!" exclaimed Brotherton. "Do you dream I should be by any code bound to accept a challenge from you?—Not, at least, I presume to think, before a jury had decided on the merits of the case."

My blood was boiling, but what could I do or say? Sir Giles rose, and was about to leave the room, remarking only—

"I don't know what to make of it."

"At all events, Sir Giles," I said hurriedly, "you will allow me to prove the truth of what I have asserted. I cannot, unfortunately, call my uncle or aunt, for they are gone; and I do not know where the servant who was with us when I took the sword away is now. But, if you will allow me, I will call Mrs. Wilson—to

prove that I had the sword when I came to visit her on that occasion, and that on the morning after sleeping here I complained of its loss to her, and went away without it."

"It would but serve to show the hallucination was early developed. We should probably find that even then you were much attracted by the armoury," said Brotherton, with a judicial air, as if I were a culprit before a magistrate.

I had begun to see that, although the old man was desirous of being just, he was a little afraid of his son. He rose as the latter spoke, however, and going into the gallery, shouted over the balustrade—

"Some one send Mrs. Wilson to the library!"

We removed to the reading-room, I carrying the scabbard which Sir Giles had returned to me as soon as he had read the label. Brotherton followed, having first gone up the little turnpike stair, doubtless to replace the manuscript.

Mrs. Wilson came, looking more pinched than ever, and stood before Sir Giles with her arms straight by her sides, like one of the ladies

of Noah's ark. I will not weary my reader with a full report of the examination. She had seen me *with* a sword, but had taken no notice of its appearance. I *might* have taken it from the armoury, for I *was* in the library all the afternoon. She had left me there thinking I was a "gentlemany" boy. I had *said* I had lost it, but she was sure *she* did not know how that could be. She was *very* sorry she had caused any trouble by asking me to the house, but Sir Giles would be pleased to remember that he had himself introduced the boy to her notice. Little she thought, &c., &c.

In fact the spiteful creature, propitiating her natural sense of justice by hinting instead of plainly suggesting injurious conclusions, was paying me back for my imagined participation in the impertinences of Clara. She had besides, as I learned afterwards, greatly resented the trouble I had caused of late.

Brotherton struck in as soon as his father had ceased questioning her.

"At all events, if he believed the sword was his, why did he not go and represent the case

to you, sir, and request justice from you? Since then he has had opportunity enough. His tale has taken too long to hatch."

"This is all very paltry," I said.

"Not so paltry as your contriving to sleep in the house in order to carry off your host's property in the morning—after studying the place to discover which room would suit your purpose best!"

Here I lost my presence of mind. A horror shook me lest something might come out to injure Mary, and I shivered at the thought of her name being once mentioned along with mine. If I had taken a moment to reflect, I must have seen that I should only add to the danger by what I was about to say. But her form was so inextricably associated in my mind with all that had happened then, that it seemed as if the slightest allusion to any event of that night would inevitably betray her; and in the tremor which, like an electric shock, passed through me from head to foot, I blurted out words importing that I had never slept in the house in my life.

"Your room was got ready for you, anyhow, Master Cumbermede," said Mrs. Wilson.

"It does not follow that I occupied it," I returned.

"I can prove that false," said Brotherton; but, probably lest he should be required to produce his witness, only added,—"At all events, he was seen in the morning, carrying the sword across the court before any one had been admitted."

I was silent; for I now saw too clearly that I had made a dreadful blunder, and that any attempt to carry assertion further, or even to explain away my words, might be to challenge the very discovery I would have given my life to ward off.

As I continued silent, steeling myself to endure, and saying to myself that disgrace was not dishonour, Sir Giles again rose, and turned to leave the room. Evidently he was now satisfied that I was unworthy of confidence.

"One moment, if you please, Sir Giles," I said. "It is plain to me there is some mystery about this affair, and it does not seem as if I

should be able to clear it up. The time may come, however, when I can. I did wrong, I see now, in attempting to right myself, instead of representing my case to you. But that does not alter the fact that the sword was and is mine, however appearances may be to the contrary. In the meantime, I restore you the scabbard, and as soon as I reach home, I shall send my man with the disputed weapon."

"It will be your better way," he said, as he took the sheath from my hand.

Without another word, he left the room. Mrs. Wilson also retired. Brotherton alone remained. I took no further notice of him, but followed Sir Giles through the armoury. He came after me, step for step, at a little distance, and as I stepped out into the gallery, said, in a tone of insulting politeness:

"You will send the sword as soon as may be quite convenient, Mr. Cumbermede? Or shall I send and fetch it?"

I turned and faced him in the dim light which came up from the hall.

"Mr. Brotherton, if you knew that book and those weapons as early as you have just said, you cannot help knowing that at that time the sword was *not* there."

"I decline to re-open the question," he said.

A fierce word leaped to my lips, but repressing it I turned away once more, and walked slowly down the stair, across the hall, and out of the house.

## CHAPTER II.

### I PART WITH MY SWORD.

I MADE haste out of the park, but wandered up and down my own field for half an hour, thinking in what shape to put what had occurred before Charley. My perplexity arose not so much from the difficulty involved in the matter itself as from my inability to fix my thoughts. My brain was for the time like an ever-revolving kaleidoscope, in which, however, there was but one fair colour—the thought of Mary. Having at length succeeded in arriving at some conclusion, I went home, and would have despatched Styles at once with the sword, had not Charley already sent him off to the stable, so that I must wait.

"What *has* kept you so long, Wilfrid?" Charley asked, as I entered.

"I've had a tremendous row with Brotherton," I answered.

"The brute! Is he there? I'm glad I was gone. What was it all about?"

"About that sword. It was very foolish of me to take it without saying a word to Sir Giles."

"So it was," he returned. "I can't think how *you* could be so foolish!"

I could, well enough. What with the dream and the waking, I could think little about anything else; and only since the consequences had overtaken me, saw how unwisely I had acted. I now told Charley the greater part of the affair—omitting the false step I had made in saying I had not slept in the house; and also, still with the vague dread of leading to some discovery, omitting to report the treachery of Clara; for, if Charley should talk to her or Mary about it, which was possible enough, I saw several points where the danger would lie very close. I simply told him that I had found

Brotherton in the armoury, and reported what followed between us. I did not at all relish having now in my turn secrets from Charley, but my conscience did not trouble me about it, seeing it was for his sister's sake; and when I saw the rage of indignation into which he flew, I was, if possible, yet more certain I was right. I told him I must go and find Styles, that he might take the sword at once; but he started up, saying he would carry it back himself, and at the same time take his leave of Sir Giles, whose house, of course, he could never enter again after the way I had been treated in it. I saw this would lead to a rupture with the whole family, but I should not regret that, for there could be no advantage to Mary either in continuing her intimacy, such as it was, with Clara, or in making further acquaintance with Brotherton. The time of their departure was also close at hand, and might be hastened without necessarily involving much of the unpleasant. Also, if Charley broke with them at once, there would be the less danger of his coming to know that I had not given him all the particu-

lars of my discomfiture. If he were to find I had told a falsehood, how could I explain to him why I had done so? This arguing on probabilities made me feel like a culprit who has to protect himself by concealment; but I will not dwell upon my discomfort in the half-duplicity thus forced upon me. I could not help it. I got down the sword, and together we looked at it for the first and last time. I found the description contained in the book perfectly correct. The upper part was inlaid with gold in a Greekish pattern, crossed by the initials W. C. I gave it up to Charley with a sigh of submission to the inevitable, and having accompanied him to the park-gate, roamed my field again until his return.

He rejoined me in a far quieter mood, and for a moment or two I was silent with the terror of learning that he had become acquainted with my unhappy blunder. After a little pause, he said,

"I'm very sorry I didn't see Brotherton. I should have liked just a word or two with him."

"It's just as well not," I said. "You would only have made another row. Didn't you see any of them?"

"I saw the old man. He seemed really cut up about it, and professed great concern. He didn't even refer to you by name—and spoke only in general terms. I told him you were incapable of what was laid to your charge; that I had not the slightest doubt of your claim to the sword,—your word being enough for me,—and that I trusted time would right you. I went too far there, however, for I haven't the slightest hope of anything of the sort."

"How did he take all that?"

"He only smiled—incredulously and sadly,—so that I couldn't find it in my heart to tell him all my mind. I only insisted on my own perfect confidence in you.—I'm afraid I made a poor advocate, Wilfrid. Why should I mind his grey hairs where justice is concerned? I am afraid I was false to you, Wilfrid."

"Nonsense; you did just the right thing, old boy. Nobody could have done better."

"*Do* you think so? I am *so* glad! I have

been feeling ever since as if I ought to have gone into a rage, and shaken the dust of the place from my feet for a witness against the whole nest of them! But somehow I couldn't —what with the honest face and the sorrowful look of the old man."

"You are always too much of a partisan, Charley; I don't mean so much in your actions —for this very one disproves that—but in your notions of obligation. You forget that you had to be just to Sir Giles as well as to me, and that he must be judged—not by the absolute facts of the case, but by what appeared to him to be the facts. He could not help misjudging me. But you ought to help misjudging him. So you see your behaviour was guided by an instinct or a soul, or what you will, deeper than your judgment."

"That may be—but he ought to have known you better than believe you capable of misconduct."

"I don't know that. He had seen very little of me. But I daresay he puts it down to cleptomania. I think he will be kind enough to give

the ugly thing a fine name for my sake. Besides, he must hold either by his son or by me."

"That's the worst that can be said on my side of the question. He must by this time be aware that that son of his is nothing better than a low scoundrel."

"It takes much to convince a father of such an unpleasant truth as that, Charley."

"Not much, if my experience goes for anything."

"I trust it is not typical, Charley."

"I suppose you're going to stand up for Geoffrey next?"

"I have no such intention. But if I did, it would be but to follow your example. We seem to change sides every now and then. You remember how you used to defend Clara when I expressed my doubts about her."

"And wasn't I right? Didn't you come over to my side?"

"Yes, I did," I said, and hastened to change the subject; adding, "As for Geoffrey, there is room enough to doubt whether he believes what

he says, and that makes a serious difference. In thinking over the affair since you left me, I have discovered further grounds for questioning his truthfulness."

"As if that were necessary!" he exclaimed, with an accent of scorn. "But tell me what you mean?" he added.

"In turning the thing over in my mind, this question has occurred to me.—He read from the manuscript that on the blade of the sword, near the hilt, were the initials of Wilfrid Cumbermede. Now, if the sword had never been drawn from the scabbard, how was that to be known to the writer?"

"Perhaps it was written about that time," said Charley.

"No; the manuscript was evidently written some considerable time after. It refers to tradition concerning it."

"Then the writer knew it by tradition."

The moment Charley's logical faculty was excited, his perception was impartial.

"Besides," he went on, "it does not follow that the sword had really never been drawn be-

fore. Mr. Close even may have done so, for his admiration was apparently quite as much for weapons themselves as for their history. Clara could hardly have drawn it as she did if it had not been meddled with before."

The terror lest he should ask me how I came to carry it home without the scabbard hurried my objection.

"That supposition, however, would only imply that Brotherton might have learned the fact from the sword itself, not from the book. I should just like to have one peep of the manuscript to see whether what he read was all there!"

"Or any of it, for that matter," said Charley. "Only it would have been a more tremendous risk than I think he would have run."

"I wish I had thought of it sooner, though."

My suspicion was that Clara had examined the blade thoroughly, and given him a full description of it. He *might*, however, have been at the Hall on some previous occasion, without my knowledge, and might have seen the half-drawn blade on the wall, examined it, and

pushed it back into the sheath; which might have so far loosened the blade that Clara was afterwards able to draw it herself. I was all but certain by this time that it was no other than she that had laid it on my bed. But then why had she drawn it? Perhaps that I might leave proof of its identity behind me—for the carrying out of her treachery, whatever the object of it might be. But this opened a hundred questions not to be discussed, even in silent thought, in the presence of another.

"Did you see your mother, Charley?" I asked.

"No, I thought it better not to trouble her. They are going to-morrow. Mary had persuaded her—why, I don't know—to return a day or two sooner than they had intended."

"I hope Brotherton will not succeed in prejudicing them against me."

"I wish that were possible," he answered. "But the time for prejudice is long gone by."

I could not believe this to be the case in respect of Mary; for I could not but think her favourably inclined to me.

"Still," I said, "I should not like their bad opinion of me to be enlarged as well as strengthened by the belief that I had attempted to steal Sir Giles's property. You *must* stand my friend there, Charley."

"Then you *do* doubt me, Wilfrid?"

"Not a bit, you foolish fellow."

"You know, I can't enter that house again, and I don't care about writing to my mother, for my father is sure to see it; but I will follow my mother and Mary the moment they are out of the grounds to-morrow, and soon see whether they've got the story by the right end."

The evening passed with me in alternate fits of fierce indignation and profound depression, for, while I was clear to my own conscience in regard of my enemies, I had yet thrown myself bound at their feet by my foolish lie; and I all but made up my mind to leave the country, and only return after having achieved such a position—of what sort I had no more idea than the school-boy before he sets himself to build a new castle in the air—as would buttress any as-

sertion of the facts I might see fit to make in after-years.

When we had parted for the night, my brains began to go about, and the centre of their gyrations was not Mary now, but Clara. What could have induced her to play me false? All my vanity, of which I had enough, was insufficient to persuade me that it could be out of revenge for the gradual diminution of my attentions to her. She had seen me pay none to Mary, I thought, unless she had caught a glimpse from the next room of the little passage of the ring, and that I did not believe. Neither did I believe she had ever cared enough about me to be jealous of whatever attentions I might pay to another. But in all my conjectures, I had to confess myself utterly foiled. I could imagine no motive. Two possibilities alone, both equally improbable, suggested themselves —the one, that she did it for pure love of mischief, which, false as she was to me, I could not believe; the other, which likewise I rejected, that she wanted to ingratiate herself with Brotherton. I had still, however, scarcely a

doubt that she had laid the sword on my bed. Trying to imagine a connection between this possible action and Mary's mistake, I built up a conjectural form of conjectural facts to this effect—that Mary had seen her go into my room, had taken it for the room she was to share with her, and had followed her either at once—in which case I supposed Clara to have gone out by the stair to the roof to avoid being seen—or afterwards, from some accident, without a light in her hand. But I do not care to set down more of my speculations, for none concerning this either were satisfactory to myself, and I remain almost as much in the dark to this day. In any case the fear remained that Clara must be ever on the borders of the discovery of Mary's secret, if indeed she did not know it already, which was a dreadful thought —more especially as I could place no confidence in her. I was glad to think, however, that they were to be parted so soon, and I had little fear of any correspondence between them.

The next morning Charley set out to waylay them at a certain point on their homeward

journey. I did not propose to accompany him. I preferred having him speak for me first, not knowing how much they might have heard to my discredit, for it was far from probable the matter had been kept from them. After he had started, however, I could not rest, and for pure restlessness sent Styles to fetch my mare. The loss of my sword was a trifle to me now, but the proximity of the place where I should henceforth be regarded as what I hardly dared to realize, was almost unendurable. As if I had actually been guilty of what was laid to my charge, I longed to hide myself in some impenetrable depth, and kept looking out impatiently for Styles's return. At length I caught sight of my Lilith's head rising white from the hollow in which the farm lay, and ran up to my room to make a little change in my attire. Just as I snatched my riding-whip from a hook by the window, I spied a horseman approaching from the direction of the park gates. Once more it was Mr. Coningham, riding hitherward from the windy trees. In no degree inclined to meet him, I hurried down the stair, and arriving at

the very moment Styles drew up, sprung into the saddle, and would have galloped off in the opposite direction, confident that no horse of Mr. Coningham's could overtake my Lilith. But the moment I was in the saddle, I remembered there was a pile of books on the window-sill of my uncle's room, belonging to the library at the Hall, and I stopped a moment to give Styles the direction to take them home at once, and, having asked a word of Miss Pease, to request her, with my kind regards, to see them safely deposited amongst the rest. In consequence of this delay, just as I set off at full speed from the door, Mr. Coningham rode round the corner of the house.

"What a devil of a hurry you are in, Mr. Cumbermede!" he cried. "I was just coming to see you. Can't you spare me a word?"

I was forced to pull up, and reply as civilly as might be.

"I am only going for a ride," I said, "and will go part of your way with you if you like."

"Thank you. That will suit me admirably.

I am going Gastford way. Have you ever been there?"

"No," I answered. "I have only just heard the name of the village."

"It is a pretty place. But there's the oddest old church you ever saw, within a couple of miles of it—alone in the middle of a forest—or at least it was a forest not long ago. It is mostly young trees now. There isn't a house within a mile of it, and the nearest stands as lonely as the church—quite a place to suit the fancy of a poet like you! Come along and see it. You may as well go one way as another, if you only want a ride."

"How far is it?" I asked.

"Only seven or eight miles across country. I can take you all the way through lanes and fields."

Perplexed or angry I was always disinclined for speech; and it was only after things had arranged themselves in my mind, or I had mastered my indignation, that I would begin to feel communicative. But something prudential inside warned me that I could not afford to lose

any friend I had; and although I was not prepared to confide my wrongs to Mr. Coningham, I felt I might some day be glad of his counsel.

## CHAPTER III.

### UMBERDEN CHURCH.

MY companion chatted away, lauded my mare, asked if I had seen Clara lately, and how the library was getting on. I answered him carelessly, without even a hint at my troubles.

"You seem out of spirits, Mr. Cumbermede?" he said. "You've been taking too little exercise. Let's have a canter. It will do you good. Here's a nice bit of sward."

I was only too ready to embrace the excuse for dropping a conversation towards which I was unable to contribute my share.

Having reached a small roadside inn, we gave our horses a little refreshment; after which, crossing a field or two by jumping the stiles,

we entered the loveliest lane I had ever seen. It was so narrow that there was just room for horses to pass each other, and covered with the greenest sward rarely trodden. It ran through the midst of a wilderness of tall hazels. They stood up on both sides of it, straight and trim as walls, high above our heads as we sat on our horses; and the lane was so serpentine that we could never see further than a few yards ahead; while, towards the end, it kept turning so much in one direction that we seemed to be following the circumference of a little circle. It ceased at length at a small double-leaved gate of iron, to which we tied our horses before entering the churchyard. But instead of a neat burial-place, which the whole approach would have given us to expect, we found a desert. The grass was of extraordinary coarseness, and mingled with quantities of vile-looking weeds. Several of the graves had not even a spot of green upon them, but were mere heaps of yellow earth in huge lumps, mixed with large stones. There was not above a score of graves in the whole place, two or three of which only

had gravestones on them. One lay open, with the rough yellow lumps all about it, and completed the desolation. The church was nearly square—small, but shapeless, with but four latticed windows, two on one side, one in the other, and the fourth in the east end. It was built partly of bricks and partly of flint stones, the walls bowed and bent, and the roof waved and broken. Its old age had gathered none of the graces of age to soften its natural ugliness, or elevate its insignificance. Except a few lichens, there was not a mark of vegetation about it. Not a single ivy leaf grew on its spotted and wasted walls. It gave a hopeless, pagan expression to the whole landscape—for it stood on a rising ground, from which we had an extensive prospect of height and hollow, cornfield and pasture and wood, away to the dim blue horizon.

"You don't find it enlivening, do you—eh?" said my companion.

"I never saw such a frightfully desolate spot," I said, "to have yet the appearance of a place of Christian worship. It looks as if

there were a curse upon it. Are all those the graves of suicides and murderers? It cannot surely be consecrated ground?"

"It's not nice," he said. "I didn't expect you to like it. I only said it was odd."

"Is there any service held in it?" I asked.

"Yes—once a fortnight or so. The rector has another living a few miles off."

"Where can the congregation come from?"

"Hardly from anywhere. There ain't generally more than five or six, I believe. Let's have a look at the inside of it."

"The windows are much too high, and no foothold."

"We'll go in."

"Where can you get the key? It must be a mile off at least, by your own account. There's no house nearer than that, you say."

He made me no reply, but going to the only flat gravestone, which stood on short thick pillars, he put his hand beneath it, and drew out a great rusty key.

"Country lawyers know a secret or two," he said.

"Not always much worth knowing," I rejoined,—"if the inside be no better than the outside."

"We'll have a look, anyhow," he said, as he turned the key in the dry lock.

The door snarled on its hinges, and disclosed a space drearier certainly, and if possible uglier than its promise.

"Really, Mr. Coningham," I said, "I don't see why you should have brought me to look at this place."

"It answered for a bait, at all events. You've had a good long ride, which was the best thing for you. Look what a wretched little vestry that is!"

It was but a corner of the east end, divided off by a faded red curtain.

"I suppose they keep a parish register here," he said. "Let us have a look."

Behind the curtain hung a dirty surplice and a gown. In the corner stood a desk like the schoolmaster's in a village school. There was a shelf with a few vellum-bound books on it, and nothing else, not even a chair in the place.

"Yes; there they are!" he said, as he took down one of the volumes from the shelf. "This one comes to a close in the midlde of the last century. I dare say there is something in this, now, that would be interesting enough to somebody. Who knows how many properties it might make change hands?"

"Not many, I should think. Those matters are pretty well seen to now."

"By some one or other—not always the rightful heirs. Life is full of the strangest facts, Mr. Cumbermede. If I were a novelist, now, like you, my experience would make me dare a good deal more in the way of invention than any novelist I happen to have read. Look there, for instance."

He pointed to the top of the last page, or rather, the last half of the cover. I read as follows:

"MARRIAGES, 1748.

"Mr. Wilfrid Cumbermede Daryll, of the Parish of —— second son of Sir Richard Daryll of Moldwarp Hall in the County of —— and Mistress Elizabeth Woodruffe were married by a license Jan. 15."

"I don't know the name of Daryll," I said.

"It was your own great-grandfather's name," he returned. "I happen to know that much."

"You knew this was here, Mr. Coningham," I said. "That is why you brought me here."

"You are right. I did know it. Was I wrong in thinking it would interest you?"

"Certainly not. I am obliged to you. But why this mystery? Why not have told me what you wanted me to go for?"

"I will why you in turn. Why should I have wanted to show you now more than any other time what I have known for as many years almost as you have lived? You spoke of a ride—why shouldn't I give a direction to it that might pay you for your trouble? And why shouldn't I have a little amusement out of it if I pleased? Why shouldn't I enjoy your surprise at finding in a place you had hardly heard of, and would certainly count most uninteresting, the record of a fact that concerned your own existence so nearly? There!"

"I confess it interests me more than you will easily think—inasmuch as it seems to offer to account for things that have greatly puzzled me

for some time. I have of late met with several hints of a connection at one time or other between the Moat and the Hall, but these hints were so isolated that I could weave no theory to connect them. Now I daresay they will clear themselves up."

"Not a doubt of that, if you set about it in earnest."

"How did he come to drop his surname?"

"That has to be accounted for."

"It follows—does it not?—that I am of the same blood as the present possessors of Moldwarp Hall?"

"You are—but the relation is not a close one," said Mr. Coningham. "Sir Giles was but distantly related to the stock of which you come."

"Then—but I must turn it over in my mind. I am rather in a maze."

"You have got some papers at the Moat?" he said—interrogatively.

"Yes; my friend Osborne has been looking over them. He found out this much—that there was once some connection between the Moat

and the Hall, but at a far earlier date than this points to, or any of the hints to which I just now referred. The other day, when I dined at Sir Giles's, Mr. Alderforge said that Cumbermede was a name belonging to Sir Giles's ancestry—or something to that effect; but that again could have had nothing to do with those papers, or with the Moat at all."

Here I stopped, for I could not bring myself to refer to the sword. It was not merely that the subject was too painful: of all things I did not want to be cross-questioned by my lawyer-companion.

"It is not amongst those you will find anything of importance, I suspect. Did your great-grandmother—the same no doubt, whose marriage is here registered—leave no letters or papers behind her?"

"I've come upon a few letters. I don't know if there is anything more."

"You haven't read them, apparently."

"I have not. I've been always going to read them, but I haven't opened one of them yet."



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"Then I recommend you—that is, if you care for an interesting piece of family history—to read those letters carefully, that is constructively."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean—putting two and two together, and seeing what comes of it; trying to make everything fit into one, you know."

"Yes. I understand you. But how do you happen to know that those letters contain a history, or that it will prove interesting when I have found it?"

"All family history ought to be interesting—at least to the last of his race," he returned, replying only to the latter half of my question. "It must, for one thing, make him feel his duty to his ancestors more strongly."

"His duty to marry, I suppose you mean?" I said with some inward bitterness. "But to tell the truth, I don't think the inheritance worth it in my case."

"It might be better," he said, with an expression which seemed odd beside the simplicity of the words.

"Ah! you think then to urge me to make money; and for the sake of my dead ancestors increase the inheritance of those that may come after me? But I believe I am already as diligent as is good for me—that is in the main, for I have been losing time of late."

"I meant no such thing, Mr. Cumbermede. I should be very doubtful whether any amount of success in literature would enable you to restore the fortunes of your family."

"Were they so very ponderous, do you think? But in truth I have little ambition of that sort. All I will readily confess to is a strong desire not to shirk what work falls to my share in the world."

"Yes," he said, in a thoughtful manner—"if one only knew what his share of the work was."

The remark was unexpected, and I began to feel a little more interest in him.

"Hadn't you better take a copy of that entry?" he said.

"Yes—perhaps I had. But I have no materials."

It did not strike me that attorneys do not usually, like excisemen, carry about an ink-bottle, when he drew one from the breast-pocket of his coat, along with a folded sheet of writing-paper, which he opened and spread out on the desk. I took the pen he offered me, and copied the entry.

When I had finished, he said—

"Leave room under it for the attestation of the parson. We can get that another time, if necessary. Then write, 'Copied by me'—and then your name and the date. It may be useful some time. Take it home and lay it with your grandmother's papers."

"There can be no harm in that," I said, as I folded it up, and put it in my pocket. "I am greatly obliged to you for bringing me here, Mr. Coningham. Though I am not ambitious of restoring the family to a grandeur of which every record has departed, I am quite sufficiently interested in its history, and shall consequently take care of this document."

"Mind you read your grandmother's papers, though," he said.

"I will," I answered.

He replaced the volume on the shelf, and we left the church; he locked the door and replaced the key under the gravestone; we mounted our horses, and after riding with me about half the way to the Moat, he took his leave at a point where our roads diverged. I resolved to devote that very evening, partly in the hope of distracting my thoughts, to the reading of my grandmother's letters.

## CHAPTER IV.

### MY FOLIO.

WHEN I reached home I found Charley there, as I had expected.

But a change had again come over him. He was nervous, restless, apparently anxious. I questioned him about his mother and sister. He had met them as planned, and had, he assured me, done his utmost to impress them with the truth concerning me. But he had found his mother incredulous, and had been unable to discover from her how much she had heard; while Mary maintained an obstinate silence, and, as he said, looked more stupid than usual. He did not tell me that Clara had accompanied them so far, and that he had walked with her back to the entrance of the park. This I heard

afterwards. When we had talked a while over the sword-business—for we could not well keep off it long—Charley seeming all the time more uncomfortable than ever, he said, perhaps merely to turn the talk into a more pleasant channel—

"By the way, where have you put your folio? I've been looking for it ever since I came in, but I can't find it. A new reading started up in my head the other day, and I want to try it both with the print and the context."

"It's in my room," I answered. "I will go and fetch it."

"We will go together," he said.

I looked where I thought I had laid it, but there it was not. A pang of foreboding terror invaded me. Charley told me afterwards that I turned as white as a sheet. I looked everywhere, but in vain; ran and searched my uncle's room, and then Charley's, but still in vain; and at last, all at once, remembered with certainty that two nights before I had laid it on the window-sill in my uncle's room. I shouted

for Styles, but he was gone home with the mare, and I had to wait, in little short of agony, until he returned. The moment he entered, I began to question him.

"You took those books home, Styles?" I said, as quietly as I could, anxious not to startle him, lest it should interfere with the just action of his memory.

"Yes, sir. I took them at once, and gave them into Miss Pease's own hands;—at least I suppose it was Miss Pease. She wasn't a young lady, sir."

"All right, I daresay. How many were there of them?"

"Six, sir."

"I told you five," I said, trembling with apprehension and wrath.

"You said four or five, and I never thought but the six were to go. They were all together on the window-sill."

I stood speechless. Charley took up the questioning.

"What sized books were they?" he asked.

"Pretty biggish—one of them quite a large

one—the same I've seen you, gentlemen, more than once, putting your heads together over. At least it looked like it."

Charley started up and began pacing about the room. Styles saw he had committed some dreadful mistake, and began a blundering expression of regret, but neither of us took any notice of him, and he crept out in dismay.

It was some time before either of us could utter a word. The loss of the sword was a trifle to this. Beyond a doubt the precious tome was now lying in the library of Moldwarp Hall —amongst old friends and companions, possibly —where years on years might elapse before one loving hand would open it, or any eyes gaze on it with reverence.

"Lost, Charley!" I said at last.—"Irrecoverably lost!"

"I will go and fetch it," he cried, starting up. "I will tell Clara to bring it out to me. It is beyond endurance this. Why should you not go and claim what both of us can take our oath to as yours?"

"You forget, Charley, how the sword-affair

cripples us—and how the claiming of this volume would only render their belief with regard to the other the more probable. You forget, too, that I *might* have placed it in the chest first, and, above all, that the name on the title-page is the same as the initials on the blade of the sword,—the same as my own."

"Yes—I see it won't do. And yet if I were to represent the thing to Sir Giles?—He doesn't care for old books——"

"You forget again, Charley, that the volume is of great money-value. Perhaps my late slip has made me fastidious—but though the book be mine—and if I had it, the proof of the contrary would lie with them—I could not take advantage of Sir Giles's ignorance to recover it."

"I might, however, get Clara—she is a favourite with him, you know——"

"I will not hear of it," I said, interrupting him, and he was forced to yield.

"No, Charley," I said again; "I must just bear it. Harder things *have* been borne, and men have got through the world and out of it

notwithstanding. If there isn't another world, why should we care much for the loss of what *must* go with the rest?—and if there is, why should we care at all?"

"Very fine, Wilfrid! but when you come to the practice—why, the less said the better."

"But that is the very point: we don't come to the practice. If we did, then the ground of it would be proved unobjectionable."

"True;—but if the practice be unattainable——"

"It would take much proving to prove that to my—*dis*satisfaction I should say; and more failure besides, I can tell you, than there will be time for in this world. If it were proved, however—don't you see it would disprove both suppositions equally? If such a philosophical spirit be unattainable, it discredits both sides of the alternative on either of which it would have been reasonable."

"There is a sophism there of course, but I am not in the mood for pulling your logic to pieces," returned Charley, still pacing up and down the room.

In sum, nothing would come of all our talk but the assurance that the volume was equally irrecoverable with the sword, and indeed with my poor character—at least, in the eyes of my immediate neighbours.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE LETTERS AND THEIR STORY.

AS soon as Charley went to bed, I betook myself to my grandmother's room, in which, before discovering my loss, I had told Styles to kindle a fire. I had said nothing to Charley about my ride, and the old church, and the marriage-register. For the time, indeed, I had almost lost what small interest I had taken in the matter—my new bereavement was so absorbing and painful; but feeling certain, when he left me, that I should not be able to sleep, but would be tormented all night by innumerable mental mosquitoes if I made the attempt, and bethinking me of my former resolution, I proceeded to carry it out.

The fire was burning brightly, and my reading

lamp was on the table, ready to be lighted. But I sat down first in my grandmother's chair and mused for I know not how long. At length my wandering thoughts rehearsed again the excursion with Mr. Coningham. I pulled the copy of the marriage-entry from my pocket, and in reading it over again, my curiosity was sufficently roused to send me to the bureau. I lighted my lamp at last, unlocked what had seemed to my childhood a treasury of unknown marvels, took from it the packet of yellow withered letters, and sat down again by the fire to read, in my great-grandmother's chair, the letters of Wilfrid Cumbermede Daryll—for so he signed himself in all of them—my great-grandfather. There were amongst them a few of her own in reply to his—badly written and badly spelt, but perfectly intelligible. I will not transcribe any of them—I have them to show if needful—but not at my command at the present moment;—for I am writing neither where I commenced my story—on the outskirts of an ancient city, nor at the Moat, but in a dreary old square in London; and those letters

lie locked again in the old bureau, and have lain unvisited through thousands of desolate days and slow creeping nights, in that room which I cannot help feeling sometimes as if the ghost of that high-spirited, restless-hearted grandmother of mine must now and then revisit, sitting in the same old chair, and wondering to find how far it was all receded from her—wondering, also, to think what a work she made, through her long and weary life, about things that look to her now such trifles.

I do not then transcribe any of the letters, but give, in a connected form, what seem to me the facts I gathered from them; not hesitating to present, where they are required, self-evident conclusions as if they were facts mentioned in them. I repeat that none of my names are real, although they all point at the real names.

Wilfrid Cumbermede was the second son of Richard and Mary Daryll of Moldwarp Hall. He was baptized Cumbermede from the desire to keep in memory the name of a celebrated ancestor, the owner, in fact, of the disputed sword—itself alluded to in the letters,—who

had been more mindful of the supposed rights of his king than the next king was of the privations undergone for his sake, for Moldwarp Hall at least was never recovered from the Roundhead branch of the family into whose possession it had drifted. In the change, however, which creeps on with new generations, there had been in the family a re-action of sentiment in favour of the more distinguished of its progenitors; and Richard Daryll, a man of fierce temper and overbearing disposition, had named his son after the cavalier. A tyrant in his family, at least in the judgment of the writers of those letters, he apparently found no trouble either with his wife or his eldest or youngest son; while, whether his own fault or not, it was very evident that from Wilfrid his annoyances had been numerous.

A legal feud had for some time existed between the Ahab of Moldwarp Hall and the Naboth of the Moat, the descendant of an ancient yeoman family of good blood, and indeed related to the Darylls themselves, of the name of Woodruffe. Sir Richard had cast covetous

eyes upon the field surrounding Stephen's comparatively humble abode, which had at one time formed a part of the Moldwarp property. In searching through some old parchments, he had found, or rather, I suppose, persuaded himself he had found sufficient evidence that this part of the property of the Moat, then of considerable size, had been willed away in contempt of the entail which covered it, and belonged by right to himself and his heirs. He had therefore instituted proceedings to recover possession, during the progress of which their usual bickerings and disputes augmented in fierceness. A decision having at length been given in favour of the weaker party, the mortification of Sir Richard was unendurable to himself, and his wrath and unreasonableness, in consequence, equally unendurable to his family. One may then imagine the paroxysm of rage with which he was seized when he discovered that, during the whole of the legal process, his son Wilfrid had been making love to Elizabeth Woodruffe, the only child of his enemy. In Wilfrid's letters, the part of the story which follows is fully

detailed for Elizabeth's information, of which the reason is also plain—that the writer had spent such a brief period afterwards in Elizabeth's society that he had not been able for very shame to recount the particulars.

No sooner had Sir Richard come to a knowledge of the hateful fact, evidently through one of his servants, than, suppressing the outburst of his rage for the moment, he sent for his son Wilfrid, and informed him, his lips quivering with suppressed passion, of the discovery he had made; accused him of having brought disgrace on the family, and of having been guilty of falsehood and treachery; and ordered him to go down on his knees and abjure the girl before heaven, or expect a father's vengeance.

But evidently Wilfrid was as little likely as any man to obey such a command. He boldly avowed his love for Elizabeth, and declared his intention of marrying her. His father, foaming with rage, ordered his servants to seize him. Overmastered in spite of his struggles, he bound him to a pillar, and taking a horse-whip, lashed him furiously; then, after his rage was thus in

a measure appeased, ordered them to carry him to his bed. There he remained, hardly able to move, the whole of that night and the next day. On the following night, he made his escape from the Hall, and took refuge with a farmer-friend a few miles off—in the neighbourhood, probably, of Umberden Church.

Here I would suggest a conjecture of my own—namely, that my ancestor's room was the same I had occupied, so—fatally, shall I say? —to myself, on the only two occasions on which I had slept at the Hall; that he escaped by the stair to the roof, having first removed the tapestry from the door, as a memorial to himself and a sign to those he left; that he carried with him the sword and the volume—both probably lying in his room at the time, and the latter little valued by any other. But all this, I repeat, is pure conjecture.

As soon as he was sufficiently recovered, he communicated with Elizabeth, prevailed upon her to marry him at once at Umberden Church, and within a few days, as near as I could judge, left her to join, as a volunteer, the

army of the Duke of Cumberland, then fighting the French in the Netherlands. Probably from a morbid fear lest the disgrace his father's brutality had inflicted should become known in his regiment, he dropped the surname of Daryll when he joined it; and—for what precise reasons I cannot be certain—his wife evidently never called herself by any other name than Cumbermede. Very likely she kept her marriage a secret, save from her own family, until the birth of my grandfather, which certainly took place before her husband's return. Indeed I am almost sure that he never returned from that campaign, but died fighting, not unlikely, at the battle of Laffeldt; and that my grannie's letters, which I found in the same packet, had been, by the kindness of some comrade, restored to the young widow.

When I had finished reading the letters, and had again thrown myself back in the old chair, I began to wonder why nothing of all this should ever have been told me. That the whole history should have dropped out of the knowledge of the family, would have been

natural enough, had my great-grandmother, as well as my great-grandfather, died in youth; but that she should have outlived her son, dying only after I, the representative of the fourth generation, was a boy at school, and yet no whisper have reached me of these facts, appeared strange. A moment's reflection showed me that the causes and the reasons of the fact must have lain with my uncle. I could not but remember how both he and my aunt had sought to prevent me from seeing my grannie alone, and how the last had complained of this in terms far more comprehensible to me now than they were then. But what could have been the reasons for this their obstruction of the natural flow of tradition? They remained wrapped in a mystery which the outburst from it of an occasional gleam of conjectural light only served to deepen.

The letters lying open on the table before me, my eyes rested upon one of the dates—the third day of March, 1747. It struck me that this date involved a discrepancy with that of the copy I had made from the register. I re-

ferred to it, and found my suspicion correct. According to the copy, my ancestors were not married until the 15th of January, 1748. I must have made a blunder—and yet I could hardly believe I had, for I had reason to consider myself accurate. If there *was* no mistake, I should have to reconstruct my facts, and draw fresh conclusions.

By this time, however, I was getting tired and sleepy and cold; my lamp was nearly out; my fire was quite gone; and the first of a frosty dawn was beginning to break in the east. I rose and replaced the papers, reserving all further thought on the matter for a condition of circumstances more favourable to a correct judgment. I blew out the lamp, groped my way to bed in the dark, and was soon fast asleep, in despite of insult, mortification, perplexity, and loss.

## CHAPTER VI.

### ONLY A LINK.

IT may be said of the body in regard of sleep as well as in regard of death, "It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power." For me, the next morning, I could almost have said, "I was sown in dishonour and raised in glory." No one can deny the power of the wearied body to paralyze the soul; but I have a correlate theory which I love, and which I expect to find true—that, while the body wearies the mind, it is the mind that restores vigour to the body, and then, like the man who has built him a stately palace, rejoices to dwell in it. I believe that, if there be a living, conscious love at the heart of the universe, the mind, in the quiescence of its consciousness in sleep, comes into a

less disturbed contact with its origin, the heart of the creation; whence gifted with calmness and strength for itself, it grows able to impart comfort and restoration to the weary frame. The cessation of labour affords but the necessary occasion; makes it possible, as it were, for the occupant of an outlying station in the wilderness to return to his father's house for fresh supplies of all that is needful for life and energy. The child-soul goes home at night, and returns in the morning to the labours of the school. Mere physical rest could never of its own negative self build up the frame in such light and vigour as come through sleep.

It was from no blessed vision that I woke the next morning, but from a deep and dreamless sleep. Yet the moment I became aware of myself and the world, I felt strong and courageous, and I began at once to look my affairs in the face. Concerning that which was first in consequence, I soon satisfied myself: I could not see that I had committed any serious fault in the whole affair. I was not at all sure that a lie in defence of the innocent, and to prevent

the knowledge of what no one had any right to know, was wrong—seeing such involves no injustice on the one side, and does justice on the other. I have seen reason since to change my mind, and count my liberty restricted to silence —not extending, that is, to the denial or assertion of what the will of God, inasmuch as it exists or does not exist, may have declared to be or not to be the fact. I now think that to lie is, as it were, to snatch the reins out of God's hand.

At all events, however, I had done the Brothertons no wrong. "What matter, then," I said to myself, "of what they believe me guilty, so long as before God and my own conscience I am clear and clean?"

Next came the practical part:—What was I to do? To right myself either in respect of their opinion, or in respect of my lost property, was more hopeless than important, and I hardly wasted two thoughts upon that. But I could not remain where I was, and soon came to the resolution to go with Charley to London at once, and taking lodgings in some obscure

recess near the Inns of Court, there to give myself to work, and work alone, in the foolish hope that one day fame might buttress reputation. In this resolution I was more influenced by the desire to be near the brother of Mary Osborne than the desire to be near my friend Charley, strong as that was. I expected thus to hear of her oftener, and even cherished the hope of coming to hear from her—of inducing her to honour me with a word or two of immediate communication. For I could see no reason why her opinions should prevent her from corresponding with one who, whatever might or might not seem to him true, yet cared for the truth, and must treat with respect every form in which he could descry its predominating presence.

I would have asked Charley to set out with me that very day, but for the desire to clear up the discrepancy between the date of my ancestor's letters, all written within the same year, and that of the copy I had made of the registration of their marriage—with which object I would compare the copy and the original. I wished also to have some talk with Mr. Coning-

ham concerning the contents of the letters which at his urgency I had now read. I got up and wrote to him therefore, asking him to ride with me again to Umberden Church, as soon as he could make it convenient, and sent Styles off at once on the mare to carry the note to Minstercombe, and bring me back an answer.

As we sat over our breakfast, Charley said suddenly,

"Clara was regretting yesterday that she had not seen the Moat. She said you had asked her once, but had never spoken of it again."

"And now I suppose she thinks, because I'm in disgrace with her friends at the Hall, that she mustn't come near me," I said, with another bitterness than belonged to the words.

"Wilfrid!" he said reproachfully; "she didn't say anything of the sort. I will write and ask her if she couldn't contrive to come over. She might meet us at the park gates."

"No," I returned; "there isn't time. I mean to go back to London—perhaps to-morrow evening. It is like turning you out, Charley,

but we shall be nearer each other in town than we were last time."

"I am delighted to hear it," he said. "I had been thinking myself that I had better go back this evening. My father is expected home in a day or two, and it would be just like him to steal a march on my chambers. Yes, I think I shall go to-night."

"Very well, old boy," I answered. "That will make it all right. It's a pity we couldn't take the journey together, but it doesn't matter much. I shall follow you as soon as I can."

"Why can't you go with me?" he asked.

Thereupon I gave him a full report of my excursion with Mr. Coningham, and the after reading of the letters, with my reason for wishing to examine the register again; telling him that I had asked Mr. Coningham to ride with me once more to Umberden Church.

When Styles returned, he informed me that Mr. Coningham at first proposed to ride back with him, but probably bethinking himself that another sixteen miles would be too much for my mare, had changed his mind and sent me

the message that he would be with me early the next day.

After Charley was gone, I spent the evening in a thorough search of the old bureau. I found in it several quaint ornaments besides those already mentioned, but only one thing which any relation to my story would justify specific mention of—namely, an ivory label, discoloured with age, on which was traceable the very number Sir Giles had read from the scabbard of Sir Wilfrid's sword. Clearly, then, my sword was the one mentioned in the book, and as clearly it had not been at Moldwarp Hall for a long time before I lost it there. If I were in any fear as to my reader's acceptance of my story, I should rejoice in the possession of that label more than in the restoration of sword or book; but amidst all my troubles, I have as yet been able to rely upon her justice and her knowledge of myself. Yes—I must mention one thing more I found—a long, sharp-pointed, straight-backed, snake-edged Indian dagger, inlaid with silver—a fierce, dangerous, almost venomous-looking weapon, in a curious case of old green morocco.

It also may have once belonged to the armoury of Moldwarp Hall. I took it with me when I left my grannie's room, and laid it in the portmanteau I was going to take to London.

My only difficulty was what to do with Lilith; but I resolved for the meantime to leave her, as before, in the care of Styles, who seemed almost as fond of her as I was myself.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A DISCLOSURE.

MR. CONINGHAM was at my door by ten o'clock, and we set out together for Umberden Church. It was a cold clear morning. The dying Autumn was turning a bright thin defiant face upon the conquering Winter. I was in great spirits, my mind being full of Mary Osborne. At one moment I saw but her own ordinary face, only what I had used to regard as dulness I now interpreted as the possession of her soul in patience; at another I saw the glorified countenance of my Athanasia, knowing that, beneath the veil of the other, this, the real, the true face ever lay. Once in my sight the frost-clung flower had blossomed; in full ideal of glory it had shone for a moment,

and then folding itself again away, had retired into the regions of faith. And while I knew that such could dawn out of such, how could I help hoping that from the face of the universe, however to my eyes it might sometimes seem to stare like the seven-days dead, one morn might dawn the unspeakable face which even Moses might not behold lest he should die of the great sight? The keen air, the bright sunshine, the swift motion—all combined to raise my spirits to an unwonted pitch; but it was a silent ecstasy, and I almost forgot the presence of Mr. Coningham. When he spoke at last, I started.

"I thought from your letter you had something to tell me, Mr. Cumbermede," he said, coming alongside of me.

"Yes, to be sure. I have been reading my grannie's papers, as I told you."

I recounted the substance of what I had found in them.

"Does it not strike you as rather strange that all this should have been kept a secret from you?" he asked.

"Very few know anything about their grandfathers," I said; "so I suppose very few fathers care to tell their children about them."

"That is because there are so few concerning whom there is anything worth telling."

"For my part," I returned, "I should think any fact concerning one of those who link me with the infinite past out of which I have come, invaluable. Even a fact which is not to the credit of an ancestor may be a precious discovery to the man who has in himself to fight the evil derived from it."

"That, however, is a point of view rarely taken. What the ordinary man values is also rare; hence few regard their ancestry, or transmit any knowledge they may have of those who have gone before them to those that come after them."

"My uncle, however, I suppose, told *me* nothing because, unlike the many, he prized neither wealth nor rank, nor what are commonly considered great deeds."

"You are not far from the truth there," said Mr. Coningham in a significant tone.

"Then *you* know why he never told me anything!" I exclaimed.

"I do—from the best authority."

"His own, you mean, I suppose."

"I do."

"But—but—I didn't know you were ever—at all—intimate with my uncle," I said.

He laughed knowingly.

"You would say, if you didn't mind speaking the truth, that you thought your uncle disliked me—disapproved of me. Come, now—did he not try to make you avoid me? You needn't mind acknowledging the fact, for, when I have explained the reason of it, you will see that it involves no discredit to either of us."

"I have no fear for my uncle."

"You are honest, if not over-polite," he rejoined. "—You do not feel so sure about my share. Well, I don't mind who knows it, for my part. I roused the repugnance, to the knowledge of which your silence confesses, merely by acting as any professional man ought to have acted—and with the best intentions. At the same time, all the blame I should

ever think of casting upon him is that he allowed his high-strung, saintly, I had almost said superhuman ideas to stand in the way of his nephew's prosperity."

"Perhaps he was afraid of that prosperity standing in the way of a better."

"Precisely so. You understand him perfectly. He was one of the best and simplest-minded men in the world."

"I am glad you do him that justice."

"At the same time I do not think he intended you to remain in absolute ignorance of what I am going to tell you. But, you see, he died very suddenly. Besides, he could hardly expect I should hold my tongue after he was gone."

"Perhaps, however, he might expect me not to cultivate your acquaintance," I said, laughing to take the sting out of the words.

"You cannot accuse yourself of having taken any trouble in that direction," he returned, laughing also.

"I believe, however," I resumed, "from what I can recall of things he said, especially on one occasion, on which he acknowledged the exist-

ence of a secret in which I was interested, he did not intend that I should always remain in ignorance of everything he thought proper to conceal from me then."

"I presume you are right. I think his conduct in this respect arose chiefly from anxiety that the formation of your character should not be influenced by the knowledge of certain facts which might unsettle you, and prevent you from reaping the due advantages of study and self-dependence in youth. I cannot, however, believe that by being open with you I shall now be in any danger of thwarting his plans, for you have already proved yourself a wise, moderate, conscientious man, diligent and painstaking. Forgive me for appearing to praise you. I had no such intention. I was only uttering as a fact to be considered in the question, what upon my honour I thoroughly believe."

"I should be happy in your good opinion, if I were able to appropriate it," I said. "But a man knows his own faults better than his neighbour knows his virtues."

"Spoken like the man I took you for, Mr. Cumbermede," he rejoined gravely.

"But to return to the matter in hand," I resumed; "what can there be so dangerous in the few facts I have just come to the knowledge of, that my uncle should have cared to conceal them from me? That a man born in humble circumstances should come to know that he had distinguished ancestors, could hardly so fill him with false notions as to endanger his relation to the laws of his existence."

"Of course—but you are too hasty. Those facts are of more importance than you are aware—involve other facts. Moldwarp Hall is *your* property, and not Sir Giles Brotherton's."

"Then the apple was my own, after all!" I said to myself exultingly. It was a strange fantastic birth of conscience and memory—forgotten the same moment, and followed by an electric flash—not of hope, not of delight, not of pride, but of pure revenge. My whole frame quivered with the shock; yet for a moment I seemed to have the strength of a Hercules. In front of me

was a stile through a high hedge: I turned Lilith's head to the hedge, struck my spurs into her, and over or through it, I know not which, she bounded. Already, with all the strength of will I could summon, I struggled to rid myself of the wicked feeling; and although I cannot pretend to have succeeded for long after, yet by the time Mr. Coningham had popped over the stile, I was waiting for him, to all appearance, I believe, perfectly calm. He, on the other hand, from whatever cause, was actually trembling. His face was pale, and his eye flashing. Was it that he had roused me more effectually than he had hoped?

"Take care, take care, my boy," he said, "or you won't live to enjoy your own. Permit me the honour of shaking hands with Sir Wilfrid Cumbermede Daryll."

After this ceremonial of prophetic investiture, we jogged away quietly, and he told me a long story about the death of the last proprietor, the degree in which Sir Giles was related to him, and his undisputed accession to the property. At that time, he said, my father was in very

bad health, and indeed died within six months of it.

"I knew your father well, Mr. Cumbermede," he went on, "—one of the best of men, with more spirit, more ambition than your uncle. It was *his* wish that his child, if a boy, should be called Wilfrid,—for though they had been married five or six years, their only child was born after his death. Your uncle did not like the name, your mother told me, but made no objection to it. So you were named after your grandfather, and great-grandfather, and I don't know how many of the race besides.—When the last of the Darylls died——"

"Then," I interrupted, "my father was the heir."

"No; you mistake: your uncle was the elder —Sir David Cumbermede Daryll, of Moldwarp Hall and The Moat," said Mr. Coningham, evidently bent on making the most of my rights.

"He never even told me he was the eldest," I said. "I always thought, from his coming home to manage the farm when my father was ill, that he was the second of the two sons."

"On the contrary, he was several years older than your father, but taking more kindly to reading than farming, was sent by his father to Oxford to study for the church, leaving the arm, as was tacitly understood, to descend to your father at your grandfather's death. After the idea of the church was abandoned he took a situation, refusing altogether to subvert the order of things already established at The Moat. So you see you are not to suppose that he kept you back from any of your rights. They were his, not yours, while he lived."

"I will not ask," I said, "why he did not enforce them. That is plain enough from what I know of his character. The more I think of that, the loftier and simpler it seems to grow. He could not bring himself to spend the energies of a soul meant for higher things on the assertion and recovery of earthly rights."

"I rather differ from you there; and I do not know," returned my companion, whose tone was far more serious than I had ever heard it before, "whether the explanation I am going to offer will raise your uncle as much in your estimation

as it does in mine. I confess I do not rank such self-denial as you attribute to him so highly as you do. On the contrary I count it a fault. How could the world go on if everybody was like your uncle?"

"If everybody was like my uncle, he would have been forced to accept the position," I said; "for there would have been no one to take it from him."

"Perhaps. But you must not think Sir Giles knew anything of your uncle's claim. He knows nothing of it now."

I had not thought of Sir Giles in connection with the matter—only of Geoffrey; and my heart recoiled from the notion of dispossessing the old man who, however misled with regard to me at last, had up till then shown me uniform kindness. In that moment I had almost resolved on taking no steps till after his death. But Mr. Coningham soon made me forget Sir Giles in a fresh revelation of my uncle.

"Although," he resumed, "all you say of your uncle's indifference to this world and its affairs is indubitably correct, I do not believe,

had there not been a prospect of your making your appearance, that he would have shirked the duty of occupying the property which was his both by law and by nature. But he knew it might be an expensive suit—for no one can tell by what tricks of the law such may be prolonged—in which case all the money he could command would soon be spent, and nothing left either to provide for your so-called aunt, for whom he had a great regard, or to give you that education, which, whether you were to succeed to the property or not, he counted indispensable. He cared far more, he said, about your having such a property in yourself as was at once personal and real, than for your having any amount of property out of yourself. Expostulation was of no use. I had previously learned—from the old lady herself—the true state of the case, and, upon the death of Sir Geoffrey Daryll, had at once communicated with him—which placed me in a position for urging him, as I did again and again, considerably to his irritation, to assert and prosecute his claim to the title and estates. I offered

to take the whole risk upon myself; but he said that would be tantamount to giving up his personal liberty until the matter was settled, which might not be in his lifetime. I may just mention, however, that, besides his religious absorption, I strongly suspect there was another cause of his indifference to worldly affairs: I have grounds for thinking that he was disappointed in a more than ordinary attachment to a lady he met at Oxford—in station considerably above any prospects he had then. To return: he was resolved that, whatever might be your fate, you should not have to meet it without such preparation as he could afford you. As you have divined, he was most anxious that your character should have acquired some degree of firmness before you knew anything of the possibility of your inheriting a large property and historical name; and I may appropriate the credit of a negative share in the carrying out of his plans, for you will bear me witness how often I might have upset them by informing you of the facts of the case."

"I am heartily obliged to you," I said, "for

not interfering with my uncle's wishes, for I am very glad indeed that I have been kept in ignorance of my rights until now. The knowledge would at one time have gone far to render me useless for personal effort in any direction worthy of it. It would have made me conceited, ambitious, boastful: I don't know how many bad adjectives would have been necessary to describe me."

"It is all very well to be modest, but I venture to think differently."

"I should like to ask you one question, Mr. Coningham," I said.

"As many as you please."

"How is it that you have so long delayed giving me the information which on my uncle's death you no doubt felt at liberty to communicate?"

"I did not know how far you might partake of your uncle's disposition, and judged that the wider your knowledge of the world, and the juster your estimate of the value of money and position, the more willing you would be to listen to the proposals I had to make."

"Do you remember," I asked, after a canter, led off by my companion, "one very stormy night on which you suddenly appeared at the Moat, and had a long talk with my uncle on the subject?"

"Perfectly," he answered. "But how did you come to know? *He* did not tell you of my visit!"

"Certainly not. But, listening in my night-gown on the stair, which is open to the kitchen, I heard enough of your talk to learn the object of your visit—namely, to carry off my skin to make bagpipes with."

He laughed so heartily that I told him the whole story of the pendulum.

"On that occasion," he said, "I made the offer to your uncle, on condition of his sanctioning the commencement of legal proceedings, to pledge myself to meet every expense of those, and of your education as well, and to claim nothing whatever in return, except in case of success."

This quite corresponded with my own childish recollections of the interview between them.

Indeed there was such an air of simple straightforwardness about his whole communication, while at the same time it accounted so thoroughly for the warning my uncle had given me against him, that I felt I might trust him entirely, and so would have told him all that had taken place at the Hall, but for the share his daughter had borne in it, and the danger of discovery to Mary.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE DATES.

I HAVE given, of course, only an epitome of our conversation, and by the time we had arrived at this point we had also reached the gate of the churchyard. Again we fastened up our horses; again he took the key from under the tombstone; and once more we entered the dreary little church, and drew aside the curtain of the vestry. I took down the volume of the register. The place was easy to find, seeing, as I have said, it was at the very end of the volume.

The copy I had taken was correct: the date of the marriage in the register was January 15, and it was the first under the 1748, written at the top of the page. I stood for a moment gaz-

ing at it; then my eye turned to the entry before it, the last on the preceding page. It bore the date December 13—under the general date at the top of the page, 1747. The next entry after it was dated March 29. At the bottom of the page, or cover rather, was the attestation of the clergyman to the number of marriages in that year; but there was no such attestation at the bottom of the preceding page. I turned to Mr. Coningham, who had stood regarding me, and, pointing to the book, said:

"Look here, Mr. Coningham. I cannot understand it. Here the date of the marriage is 1748; and that of all their letters, evidently written after the marriage, is 1747."

He looked, and stood looking, but made me no reply. In my turn I looked at him. His face expressed something not far from consternation; but the moment he became aware that I was observing him, he pulled out his handkerchief, and wiping his forehead with an attempt at a laugh, said:

"How hot it is! Yes; there's something

awkward there. I hadn't observed it before. I must inquire into that. I confess I cannot explain it all at once. It does certainly seem queer. I must look into those dates when I go home."

He was evidently much more discomposed than he was willing I should perceive. He always spoke rather hurriedly, but I had never heard him stammer before. I was certain that he saw or at least dreaded something fatal in the discrepancy I had pointed out. As to looking into it when he got home, that sounded very like nonsense. He pulled out a note-book, however, and said:

"I may just as well make a note of the blunder—for blunder it must be—a very awkward one indeed, I am afraid. I should think so—I cannot—but then——"

He went on uttering disjointed and unfinished expressions, while he made several notes. His manner was of one who regards the action he is about as useless, yet would have it supposed the right thing to do.

"There!" he said, shutting up his note-book

with a slam; and turning away he strode out of the place—much, it seemed to me, as if his business there was over for ever. I gave one more glance at the volume, and replaced it on the shelf. When I rejoined him, he was already mounted and turning to move off.

"Wait a moment, Mr. Coningham," I said. "I don't exactly know where to put the key."

"Fling it under the gravestone, and come along," he said, muttering something more, in which, perhaps, I only fancied I heard certain well-known maledictions.

By this time my spirits had sunk as much below their natural level as, a little before, they had risen above it. But I felt that I must be myself, and that no evil any more than good fortune ought for a moment to perturb the tenor of my being. Therefore, having locked the door deliberately and carefully, I felt about along the underside of the gravestone until I found the ledge where the key had lain. I then made what haste I could to mount and follow Mr. Coningham, but Lilith delayed the

operation by her eagerness. I gave her the rein, and it was well no one happened to be coming in the opposite direction through that narrow and tortuous passage, for she flew round the corners—"turning close to the ground, like a cat when scratchingly she wheels about after a mouse," as my old favourite, Sir Philip Sidney, says. Notwithstanding her speed, however, when I reached the mouth of the lane, there was Mr. Coningham half across the first field, with his coat-tails flying out behind him. I would not allow myself to be left in such a discourteous fashion, and gave chase. Before he had measured the other half of the field, I was up with him.

"That mare of yours is a clever one," he said, as I ranged alongside of him. "I thought I would give her a breather. She hasn't enough to do."

"She's not breathing so *very* fast," I returned. "Her wind is as good as her legs."

"Let's get along then, for I've lost a great deal of time this morning. I ought to have been at Squire Strode's an hour ago. How

hot the sun is, to be sure, for this time of the year!"

As he spoke, he urged his horse, but I took and kept the lead, feeling, I confess, a little angry, for I could not help suspecting he had really wanted to run away from me. I did what I could, however, to behave as if nothing had happened. But he was very silent, and his manner towards me was quite altered. Neither could I help thinking it scarcely worthy of a man of the world, not to say a lawyer, to show himself so much chagrined. For my part, having simply concluded that the new-blown bubble hope had burst, I found myself just where I was before—with a bend sinister on my scutcheon, it might be, but with a good conscience, a tolerably clear brain, and the dream of my Athanasia.

The moment we reached the road, Mr. Coningham announced that his way was in the opposite direction to mine, said his good morning, shook hands with me, and jogged slowly away. I knew that was not the nearest way to Squire Strode's.

I could not help laughing—he had so much the look of a dog with his tail between his legs, or a beast of prey that had made his spring and missed his game. I watched him for some time, for Lilith being pulled both ways—towards home, and after her late companion—was tolerably quiescent, but he never cast a glance behind him. When at length a curve in the road hid him from my sight, I turned and went quietly home, thinking what the significance of the unwelcome discovery might be. If the entry of the marriage under that date could not be proved a mere blunder, of which I could see no hope, then certainly my grandfather must be regarded as born out of wedlock, a supposition which, if correct, would account for the dropping of the *Daryll*.

On the way home I jumped no hedges.

Having taken my farewell of Lilith, I packed my "bag of needments," locked the door of my uncle's room, which I would have no one enter in my absence, and set out to meet the night mail.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CHARLEY AND CLARA.

ON my arrival in London, I found Charley waiting for me, as I had expected, and with his help soon succeeded in finding, in one of the streets leading from the Strand to the river, the accommodation I wanted. There I settled, and resumed the labour so long and thanklessly interrupted.

When I recounted the circumstances of my last interview with Mr. Coningham, Charley did not seem so much surprised at the prospect which had opened before me as disappointed at its sudden close, and would not admit that the matter could be allowed to rest where it was.

"Do you think the change of style could

possibly have anything to do with it?" he asked, after a meditative silence.

"I don't know," I replied. "Which change of style do you mean?"

"I mean the change of the beginning of the year from March to January," he answered.

"When did that take place?" I asked.

"Some time about the middle of the last century," he replied; "but I will find out exactly."

The next night he brought me the information that the January which, according to the old style, would have been that of 1752 was promoted to be the first month of the year 1753.

My dates then were, by several years, antecedent to the change, and it was an indisputable anachronism that the January between the December of 1747 and the March of 1748, should be entered as belonging to the latter year. This seemed to throw a little dubious light upon the perplexity; the January thus entered belonged clearly to 1747, and, therefore, was the

same January with that of my ancestor's letters. Plainly, however, the entry could not stand in evidence, its interpolation at least appearing indubitable, for how otherwise could it stand at the beginning of the new year instead of towards the end of the old, five years before the change of style? Also, now I clearly remember that it did look a little crushed between the heading of the year and the next entry. It must be a forgery—and a stupid one as well, seeing the bottom of the preceding page, where there was a small blank, would have been the proper place to choose for it—that is, under the heading 1747. Could the 1748 have been inserted afterwards? That did not appear likely, seeing it belonged to all the rest of the entries on the page, there being none between the date in question and March 29, on the 25th of which month the new year began. The conclusion lying at the door was that someone had inserted the marriage so long after the change of style that he knew nothing of the trap there lying for his forgery. It seemed probable that, blindly following the

letters, he had sought to place it in the beginning of the previous year, but, getting bewildered in the apparent eccentricities of the arrangement of month and year, had at last drawn his bow at a venture. Neither this nor any other theory I could fashion did I, however, find in the least satisfactory. All I could be sure of was that here was no evidence of the marriage—on the contrary, a strong presumption against it.

For my part, the dream in which I had indulged had been so short that I very soon recovered from the disappointment of the waking therefrom. Neither did the blot with which the birth of my grandfather was menaced affect me much. My chief annoyance in regard of that aspect of the affair was in being *so* related to Geoffrey Brotherton.

I cannot say how it came about, but I could not help observing that, by degrees, a manifest softening appeared in Charley's mode of speaking of his father, although I knew that there was not the least approach to a more cordial intercourse between them. I attributed the

change to the letters of his sister, which he aways gave me to read. From them I have since classed her with a few others I have since known, chiefly women, the best of their kind, so good and so large-minded that they seem ever on the point of casting aside the unworthy opinions they have been taught, and showing themselves the true followers of him who cared only for the truth, and yet holding by the doctrines of men, and believing them to be the mind of God.

In one or two of Charley's letters to her I ventured to insert a question or two, and her reference to these in her replies to Charley gave me an opportunity of venturing to write to her more immediately, in part defending what I thought the truth, in part expressing all the sympathy I honestly could with her opinions. She replied very kindly, very earnestly, and with a dignity of expression as well as of thought which harmonized entirely with my vision of her deeper and grander nature.

The chief bent of my energies was now to

vindicate for myself a worthy position in the world of letters; but my cherished hope lay in the growth of such an intimacy with Mary Osborne as might afford ground for the cultivation of far higher and more precious ambitions.

It was not, however, with the design of furthering these that I was now guilty of what will seem to most men a Quixotic action enough.

"Your sister is fond of riding—is she not?" I asked Charley one day, as we sauntered with our cigars on the terrace of the Adelphi.

"As fond as one can possibly be who has had so little opportunity," he said.

"I was hoping to have a ride with her and Clara the very evening when that miserable affair occurred. The loss of that ride was at least as great a disappointment to me as the loss of the sword."

"You seem to like my sister, Wilfrid," he said.

"At least I care more for her good opinion than I do for any woman's—or man's either, Charley."

"I am so glad!" he responded. "You like her better than Clara, then?"

"Ever so much," I said.

He looked more pleased than annoyed, I thought—certainly neither the one nor the other entirely. His eyes sparkled, but there was a flicker of darkness about his forehead.

"I am very glad," he said again, after a moment's pause. "I thought—I was afraid—I had fancied sometimes—you were still a little in love with Clara."

"Not one atom," I returned. "She cured me of that quite. There is no danger of that any more," I added—foolishly, seeing I intended no explanation.

"How do you mean?" he asked, a little uneasily.

I had no answer ready, and a brief silence followed. The subject was not resumed.

It may well seem strange to my reader that I had never yet informed him of the part Clara had had in the matter of the sword. But, as I have already said, when anything moved me very deeply I was never ready to talk about it.

Somehow, perhaps from something of the cat-nature in me, I never liked to let go my hold of it without good reason. Especially I shrunk from imparting what I only half comprehended; and besides, in the present case, the thought of Clara's behaviour was so painful to me still that I recoiled from any talk about it—the more that Charley had a kind and good opinion of her, and would, I knew, only start objections and explanations defensive, as he had done before on a similar occasion, and this I should have no patience with. I had, therefore, hitherto held my tongue. There was, of course, likewise the fear of betraying his sister, only the danger of that was small, now that the communication between the two girls seemed at an end for the time; and if it had not been that a certain amount of mutual reticence had arisen between us, first on Charley's part and afterwards on mine, I doubt much whether, after all, I should not by this time have told him the whole story. But the moment I had spoken as above, the strangeness of his look, which seemed to indicate that he would gladly

request me to explain myself but for some hidden reason, flashed upon me the suspicion that he was himself in love with Clara. The moment the suspicion entered, a host of circumstances crystallized around it. Fact after fact flashed out of my memory, from the first meeting of the two in Switzerland down to this last time I had seen them together, and in the same moment I was convinced that the lady I saw him with in the Regent's Park was no other than Clara. But, if it were so, why had he shut me out from his confidence? Of the possible reasons which suggested themselves, the only one which approached the satisfactory was that he had dreaded hurting me by the confession of his love for her, and preferred leaving it to Clara to cure me of a passion to which my doubtful opinion of her gave a probability of weakness and ultimate evanescence.

A great conflict awoke in me. What ought I to do? How could I leave him in ignorance of the falsehood of the woman he loved? But I could not make the disclosure now. I must think about the how and the how much to tell

him. I returned to the subject which had led up to the discovery.

"Does your father keep horses, Charley?"

"He has a horse for his parish work, and my mother has an old pony for her carriage."

"Is the rectory a nice place?"

"I believe it is, but I have such painful associations with it that I hardly know."

The Arab loves the desert sand where he was born; the thief loves the court where he used to play in the gutter. How miserable Charley's childhood must have been! How *could* I tell him of Clara's falsehood?

"Why doesn't he give Mary a pony to ride?" I asked. "But I suppose he hasn't room for another?"

"Oh! yes, there's plenty of room. His predecessor was rather a big fellow. In fact, the stables are on much too large a scale for a clergyman. I daresay he never thought of it. I must do my father the justice to say there's nothing stingy about him, and I believe he loves my sister even more than my mother. It certainly would be the best thing he could do for

her to give her a pony. But she will die of religion—young, and be sainted in a twopenny tract, and that is better than a pony. Her hair doesn't curl—that's the only objection. Some one has remarked that all the good children who die have curly hair."

Poor Charley! Was his mind more healthy, then? Was he less likely to come to an early death? Was his want of faith more life-giving than what he considered her false faith?

"I see no reason to fear it," I said, with a tremor at my heart as I thought of my dream.

That night I was sleepless—but about Charley—not about Mary. What could I do?—what ought I to do? Might there be some mistake in my judgment of Clara? I searched, and I believe searched honestly, for any possible mode of accounting for her conduct that might save her uprightness, or mitigate the severity of the condemnation I had passed upon her. I could find none. At the same time, what I was really seeking was an excuse for saying nothing to Charley. I suspect now that, had I searched after justification or excuse for her from love to

herself, I might have succeeded in constructing a theory capable of sheltering her; but, as it was, I failed utterly, and, turning at last from the effort, I brooded instead upon the Quixotic idea already adverted to, grown the more attractive as offering a good excuse for leaving Charley for a little.

## CHAPTER X.

### LILITH MEETS WITH A MISFORTUNE.

THE next day, leaving a note to inform Charley that I had run home for a week, I set out for the Moat, carrying with me the best side-saddle I could find in London.

As I left the inn at Minstercombe in a gig, I saw Clara coming out of a shop. I could not stop and speak to her, for, not to mention the opinion I had of her, and the treachery of which I accused her, was I not at that very moment meditating how best to let her lover know that she was not to be depended upon? I touched the horse with the whip, and drove rapidly past. Involuntarily, however, I glanced behind, and saw a white face staring after me. Our looks

encountering thus, I lifted my hat, but held on my course.

I could not help feeling very sorry for her. The more falsely she had behaved, she was the more to be pitied. She looked very beautiful with that white face. But how different was her beauty from that of my Athanasia!

Having tried the side-saddle upon Lilith, and found all it wanted was a little change in the stuffing about the withers, I told Styles to take it and the mare to Minstercombe the next morning, and have it properly fitted.

What trifles I am lingering upon! Lilith is gone to the worms—no, that I *do not* believe: amongst the things most people believe, and I cannot, that is one; but at all events she is dead, and the saddle gone to worms; and yet, for reasons which will want no explanation to my one reader, I care to linger even on the fringes of this part of the web of my story.

I wandered about the field and house, building and demolishing many an airy abode, until Styles came back. I had told him to get the

job done at once, and not return without the saddle.

"Can I trust you, Styles?" I said abruptly.

"I hope so, sir. If I may make so bold, I don't think I was altogether to blame about that book——"

"Of course not. I told you so. Never think of it again. Can you keep a secret?"

"I can try, sir. You've been a good master to me, I'm sure, sir."

"That I mean to be still, if I can. Do you know the parish of Spurdene?"

"I was born there, sir."

"Ah! that's not so convenient. Do you know the rectory?"

"Every stone of it, I may say, sir."

"And do they know you?"

"Well, it's some years since I left—a mere boy, sir."

"I want you, then—if it be possible—you can tell best—to set out with Lilith to-morrow night—I hope it will be a warm night. You must groom her thoroughly, put on the side saddle and her new bridle, and lead her—

you're not to ride her, mind—I don't want her to get hot—lead her to the rectory of Spurdene —and—now here is the point—if it be possible, take her up to the stable, and fasten her by this silver chain to the ring at the door of it—as near morning as you safely can to avoid discovery, for she mustn't stand longer at this season of the year than can be helped. I will tell you all.—I mean her for a present to Miss Osborne; but I do not want anyone to know where she comes from. None of them, I believe, have ever seen her. I will write something on a card, which you will fasten to one of the pommels, throwing over all this horse-cloth."

I gave him a fine bear-skin I had bought for the purpose. He smiled, and, with evident enjoyment of the spirit of the thing, promised to do his best.

Lilith looked lovely as he set out with her, late the following night. When he returned the next morning, he reported that everything had succeeded admirably. He had carried out my instructions to the letter; and my white

Lilith had by that time, I hoped, been caressed, possibly fed, by the hands of Mary Osborne herself.

I may just mention that on the card I had written, or rather printed, the words: "To Mary Osborne, from a friend."

In a day or two I went back to London, but said nothing to Charley of what I had done—waiting to hear from him first what they said about it.

"I say, Wilfrid!" he cried, as he came into my room with his usual hurried step, the next morning but one, carrying an open letter in his hand, "what's this you've been doing—you sly old fellow? You ought to have been a prince, by Jove!"

"What do you accuse me of? I must know that first, else I might confess to more than necessary. One must be on one's guard with such as you."

"Read that," he said, putting the letter into my hand.

It was from his sister. One passage was as follows:

"A strange thing has happened. A few mornings ago the loveliest white horse was found tied to the stable door, with a side-saddle, and a card on it directed to *me.* I went to look at the creature. It was like the witch-lady in Christabel, 'beautiful exceedingly.' I ran to my father, and told him. He asked me who had sent it, but I knew no more than he did. He said I couldn't keep it unless we found out who had sent it, and probably not then, for the proceeding was as suspicious as absurd. To-day he has put an advertisement in the paper to the effect that, if the animal is not claimed before, it will be sold at the horse-fair next week, and the money given to the new school fund. I feel as if I couldn't bear parting with it, but of course I can't accept a present without knowing where it comes from. Have you any idea who sent it? I am sure papa is right about it, as indeed, dear Charley, he always is."

I laid down the letter, and, full of mortification, went walking about the room.

"Why didn't you tell me, Wilfrid?"

"I thought it better, if you were questioned, that you should not know. But it was a foolish thing to do—very. I see it now. Of course your father is right. It doesn't matter though. I will go down and buy her."

"You had better not appear in it. Go to the Moat, and send Styles."

"Yes—that will be best. Of course it will. When is the fair, do you know?"

"I will find out for you. I hope some rascal mayn't in the meantime take my father in, and persuade him to give her up. Why shouldn't I run down and tell him, and get back poor Lilith without making you pay for your own?"

"Indeed you shan't. The mare is your sister's, and I shall lay no claim to her. I have money enough to redeem her."

Charley got me information about the fair, and the day before it I set out for the Moat.

When I reached Minstercombe, having more time on my hands than I knew what to do with, I resolved to walk round by Spurdene. It would not be more than ten or twelve miles, and so I should get a peep of the rectory. On

the way I met a few farmer-looking men on horseback, and just before entering the village saw at a little distance a white creature—very like my Lilith—with a man on its back, coming towards me.

As they drew nearer, I was certain of the mare, and, thinking it possible the rider might be Mr. Osborne, withdrew into a thicket on the roadside. But what was my dismay to discover that it was indeed my Lilith, but ridden by Geoffrey Brotherton! As soon as he was past, I rushed into the village, and found that the people I had met were going from the fair. Charley had been misinformed. I was too late: Brotherton had bought my Lilith. Half distracted with rage and vexation, I walked on and on, never halting till I reached the Moat. Was this man destined to swallow up every thing I cared for? Had he suspected me as the foolish donor, and bought the mare to spite me? A thousand times rather would I have had her dead. Nothing on earth would have tempted me to sell my Lilith but inability to feed her, and then I would rather have shot her.

I felt poorer than even when my precious folio was taken from me, for the lowest animal life is a greater thing than a rare edition. I did not go to bed at all that night, but sat by my fire or paced about the room till dawn, when I set out for Minstercombe, and reached it in time for the morning coach to London. The whole affair was a folly, and I said to myself that I deserved to suffer. Before I left, I told Styles, and begged him to keep an eye on the mare, and, if ever he learned that her owner wanted to part with her, to come off at once and let me know. He was greatly concerned at my ill-luck, as he called it, and promised to watch her carefully. He knew one of the grooms, he said, a little, and would cultivate his acquaintance.

I could not help wishing now that Charley would let his sister know what I had tried to do for her, but of course I would not say so. I think he did tell her, but I never could be quite certain whether or not she knew it. I wonder if she ever suspected me. I think not. I have too good reason to fear that she

attributed to another the would-be gift; I believe that, from Brotherton's buying her, they thought he had sent her—a present certainly far more befitting his means than mine. But I came to care very little about it, for my correspondence with her, through Charley, went on. I wondered sometimes how she could keep from letting her father know: that he did not know I was certain, for he would have put a stop to it at once. I conjectured that she had told her mother, and that she, fearing to widen the breach between her husband and Charley, had advised her not to mention it to him; while, believing it would do both Charley and me good, she did not counsel her to give up the correspondence. It must be considered, also, that it was long before I said a word implying any personal interest. Before I ventured that, I had some ground for thinking that my ideas had begun to tell upon hers, for, even in her letters to Charley, she had begun to drop the common religious phrases, while all she said seemed to indicate a widening and deepening and simplifying of her faith. I do not for

a moment imply that she had consciously given up one of the dogmas of the party to which she belonged, but there was the perceptible softening of growth in her utterances, and after that was plain to me, I began to let out my heart to her a little more.

About this time also I began to read once more the history of Jesus, asking myself as if on a first acquaintance with it, "Could it be—might it not be that, if there were a God, he would visit his children after some fashion? If so, is this a likely fashion? May it not even be the only right fashion?" In the story I found at least a perfection surpassing everything to be found elsewhere; and I was at least sure that whatever this man said must be true. If one could only be as sure of the record! But if ever a dawn was to rise upon me, here certainly the sky would break; here I thought I already saw the first tinge of the returning life-blood of the swooning world. The gathering of the waters of conviction at length one morning broke out in the following verses, which seemed more than half given to me, the only effort re-

quired being to fit them rightly together:—

Come to me, come to me, O my God;
  Come to me everywhere!
Let the trees mean thee, and the grassy sod,
  And the water and the air.

For thou art so far that I often doubt,
  As on every side I stare,
Searching within, and looking without,
  If thou art anywhere.

How did men find thee in days of old?
  How did they grow so sure?
They fought in thy name, they were glad and bold,
  They suffered, and kept themselves pure.

But now they say—neither above the sphere,
  Nor down in the heart of man,
But only in fancy, ambition, or fear,
  The thought of thee began.

If only that perfect tale were true
  Which, with touch of sunny gold,
Of the ancient many makes one anew,
  And simplicity manifold.

But *he* said that they who did his word
  The truth of it should know:
I will try to do it—if he be Lord,
  Perhaps the old spring will flow;

Perhaps the old spirit-wind will blow
  That he promised to their prayer;
And doing thy will, I yet shall know
  Thee, Father, everywhere!

These lines found their way without my concurrence into a certain religious magazine, and I was considerably astonished, and yet more pleased, one evening when Charley handed me, with the kind regards of his sister, my own lines, copied by herself. I speedily let her know they were mine, explaining that they had found their way into print without my cognizance. She testified so much pleasure at the fact, and the little scraps I could claim as my peculiar share of the contents of Charley's envelopes grew so much more confiding that I soon ventured to write more warmly than hitherto. A period longer than usual passed before she wrote again, and when she did she took no express notice of my last letter. Foolishly or not, I regarded this as a favourable sign, and wrote several letters, in which I allowed the true state of my feelings towards her to appear. At length I wrote a long letter in which, without a word of direct love-making, I thought yet to reveal that I loved her with all my heart. It was chiefly occupied with my dream on that memorable night—of course

without the slightest allusion to the waking, or anything that followed. I ended abruptly, telling her that the dream often recurred, but as often as it drew to its lovely close, the lifted veil of Athanasia revealed ever and only the countenance of Mary Osborne.

The answer to this came soon, and in few words.

"I dare not take to myself what you write. That would be presumption indeed, not to say wilful self-deception. It will be honour enough for me if in any way I serve to remind you of the lady in your dream. Wilfrid, if you love me, take care of my Charley. I must not write more.—M. O."

It was not much, but enough to make me happy. I write it from memory—every word as it lies where any moment I could read it—shut in a golden coffin whose lid I dare not open.

## CHAPTER XI.

### TOO LATE.

I MUST now go back a little. After my suspicions had been aroused as to the state of Charley's feelings, I hesitated for a long time before I finally made up my mind to tell him the part Clara had had in the loss of my sword. But while I was thus restrained by dread of the effect the disclosure would have upon him if my suspicions were correct, those very suspicions formed the strongest reason for acquainting him with her duplicity; and, although I was always too ready to put off the evil day so long as doubt supplied excuse for procrastination, I could not have let so much time slip by and nothing said but for my absorption in Mary.

At length, however, I had now resolved, and

one evening, as we sat together, I took my pipe from my mouth, and, shivering bodily, thus began:

"Charley," I said, "I have had for a good while something on my mind, which I cannot keep from you longer."

He looked alarmed instantly. I went on.

"I have not been quite open with you about that affair of the sword."

He looked yet more dismayed; but I must go on, though it tore my very heart. When I came to the point of my overhearing Clara talking to Brotherton, he started up, and, without waiting to know the subject of their conversation, came close up to me, and, his face distorted with the effort to keep himself quiet, said, in a voice hollow and still and far-off, like what one fancies of the voice of the dead:

"Wilfrid, you said Brotherton, I think?"

"I did, Charley."

"She never told me that!"

"How could she when she was betraying your friend?"

"No no!" he cried, with a strange mixture of

command and entreaty; "don't say that. There is some explanation. There *must* be."

"She told *me* she hated him," I said.

"*I know* she hates him. What was she saying to him?"

"I tell you she was betraying me, your friend, who had never done her any wrong, to the man she had told me she hated, and whom I had heard her ridicule."

"What do you mean by betraying you?"

I recounted what I had overheard. He listened with clenched teeth and trembling white lips; then burst into a forced laugh.

"What a fool I am! Distrust *her!* I will *not*. There is some explanation! There *must* be!"

The dew of agony lay thick on his forehead. I was greatly alarmed at what I had done, but I could not blame myself.

"Do be calm, Charley," I entreated.

"I am as calm as death," he replied, striding up and down the room with long strides.

He stopped and came up to me again.

"Wilfrid," he said, "I am a damned fool. I

am going now. Don't be frightened—I am perfectly calm. I will come and explain it all to you to-morrow—no—the next day—or the next at latest. She had some reason for hiding it from me, but I shall have it all the moment I ask her. She is not what you think her. I don't for a moment blame you—but—are you sure it was —Clara's—voice you heard?" he added with forced calmness and slow utterance.

"A man is not likely to mistake the voice of a woman he ever fancied himself in love with."

"Don't talk like that, Wilfrid. You'll drive me mad. How should she know you had taken the sword?"

"She was always urging me to take it. There lies the main sting of the treachery. But I never told you where I found the sword."

"What can that have to do with it?"

"I found it on my bed that same morning when I woke. It could not have been there when I lay down."

"Well?"

"Charley, I believe *she* laid it there."

He leaped at me like a tiger. Startled, I jumped to my feet. He laid hold of me by the throat, and griped me with a quivering grasp. Recovering my self-possession, I stood perfectly still, making no effort even to remove his hand, although it was all but choking me. In a moment or two he relaxed his hold, burst into tears, took up his hat, and walked to the door.

"Charley! Charley! you must *not* leave me so," I cried, starting forwards.

"To-morrow, Wilfrid; to-morrow," he said, and was gone.

He was back before I could think what to do next. Opening the door half way, he said—as if a griping hand had been on *his* throat—

"I—I—I—don't believe it, Wilfrid. You only said you believed it. *I* don't. Good night. I'm all right now. *Mind, I don't believe it.*"

He shut the door. Why did I not follow him?

But if I had followed him, what could I have said or done? In every man's life come awful

moments when he must meet his fate—dree his weird—alone. Alone, I say, if he have no God—for man or woman cannot aid him, cannot touch him, cannot come near him. Charley was now in one of those crises, and I could not help him. Death is counted an awful thing: it seems to me that life is an infinitely more awful thing.

In the morning I received the following letter:—

"DEAR MR. CUMBERMEDE,

"You will be surprised at receiving a note from me—still more at its contents. I am most anxious to see you—so much so that I venture to ask you to meet me where we can have a little quiet talk. I am in London, and for a day or two sufficiently my own mistress to leave the choice of time and place with you—only let it be when and where we shall not be interrupted. I presume on old friendship in making this extraordinary request, but I do not presume in my confidence that you will not misunderstand my motives. One

thing only I *beg*—that you will not inform C. O. of the petition I make.

"Your old friend,

"C. C."

What was I to do? To go, of course. She *might* have something to reveal which would cast light on her mysterious conduct. I cannot say I expected a disclosure capable of removing Charley's misery, but I did vaguely hope to learn something that might alleviate it. Anyhow, I would meet her, for I dared not refuse to hear her. To her request of concealing it from Charley, I would grant nothing beyond giving it quarter until I should see whither the affair tended. I wrote at once—making an appointment for the same evening. But was it from a suggestion of Satan, from an evil impulse of human spite, or by the decree of fate, that I fixed on that part of the Regent's Park in which I had seen him and the lady I now believed to have been Clara walking together in the dusk? I cannot now tell. The events which followed have destroyed all certainty,

but I fear it was a flutter of the wings of revenge, a shove at the spokes of the wheel of time to hasten the coming of its circle.

Anxious to keep out of Charley's way—for the secret would make me wretched in his presence—I went into the City, and, after an early dinner, sauntered out to the Zoological Gardens, to spend the time till the hour of meeting. But there, strange to say, whether from insight or fancy, in every animal face I saw such gleams of a troubled humanity that at last I could bear it no longer, and betook myself to Primrose Hill.

It was a bright afternoon, wonderfully clear, with a crisp frosty feel in the air. But the sun went down, and one by one, here and there, above and below, the lights came out and the stars appeared, until at length sky and earth were full of flaming spots, and it was time to seek our rendezvous.

I had hardly reached it when the graceful form of Clara glided towards me. She perceived in a moment that I did not mean to shake hands with her. It was not so dark but

that I saw her bosom heave and a flush overspread her countenance.

"You wished to see me, Miss Coningham," I said. "I am at your service."

"What is wrong, Mr. Cumbermede? You never used to speak to me in such a tone."

"There is nothing wrong if you are not more able than I to tell what it is."

"Why did you come if you were going to treat me so?"

"Because you requested it."

"Have I offended you, then, by asking you to meet me? I trusted you. I thought *you* would never misjudge me."

"I should be but too happy to find I had been unjust to you, Miss Coningham. I would gladly go on my knees to you to confess that fault, if I could only be satisfied of its existence. Assure me of it, and I will bless you."

"How strangely you talk! Some one has been maligning me."

"No one. But I have come to the knowledge of what only one besides yourself could have told me."

"You mean——"

"Geoffrey Brotherton."

"*He!* He has been telling you——"

"No—thank heaven! I have not yet sunk to the slightest communication with *him*."

She turned her face aside. Veiled as it was by the gathering gloom, she yet could not keep it towards me. But after a brief pause she looked at me and said,

"You know more than—I do not know what you mean."

"I do know more than you think I know. I will tell you under what circumstances I came to such knowledge."

She stood motionless.

"One evening," I went on, "after leaving Moldwarp Hall with Charles Osborne, I returned to the library to fetch a book. As I entered the room where it lay, I heard voices in the armoury. One was the voice of Geoffrey Brotherton—a man you told me you hated. The other was yours."

She drew herself up, and stood stately before me.

"Is that your accusation?" she said. "Is a woman never to speak to a man because she detests him?"

She laughed—I thought drearily.

"Apparently not—for then I presume you would not have asked me to meet you."

"Why should you think I hate *you?*"

"Because you have been treacherous to me."

"In talking to Geoffrey Brotherton? I do hate him. I hate him more than ever. I spoke the truth when I told you that."

"Then you do not hate me?"

"No."

"And yet you delivered me over to my enemy bound hand and foot, as Delilah did Samson.—I heard what you said to Brotherton."

She seemed to waver, but stood—speechless, as if waiting for more.

"I heard you tell him that I had taken that sword—the sword you had always been urging me to take—the sword you unsheathed and laid on my bed that I might be tempted to take it—

why I cannot understand, for I never did you a wrong to my poor knowledge. I fell into your snare, and you made use of the fact you had achieved to ruin my character, and drive me from the house in which I was foolish enough to regard myself as conferring favours rather than receiving them. You have caused me to be branded as a thief for taking—at your suggestion—that which was and still is my own!"

"Does Charley know this?" she asked, in a strangely altered voice.

"He does. He learned it yesterday."

"O my God!" she cried, and fell kneeling on the grass at my feet. "Wilfrid! Wilfrid! I will tell you all. It was to tell you all about this very thing that I asked you to come. I could not bear it longer. Only your tone made me angry. I did not know you knew so much."

The very fancy of such submission from such a creature would have thrilled me with a wild compassion once; but now I thought of Charley and felt cold to her sorrow as well as her loveli-

ness. When she lifted her eyes to mine, however—it was not so dark but I could see their sadness—I began to hope a little for my friend. I took her hand and raised her. She was now weeping with down-bent head.

"Clara, you shall tell me all. God forbid I should be hard upon you! But you know I cannot understand it. I have no clue to it. How could you serve me so?"

"It is very hard for me—but there is no help now: I must confess disgrace, in order to escape infamy. Listen to me, then—as kindly as you can, Wilfrid. I beg your pardon; I have no right to use any old familiarity with you. Had my father's plans succeeded, I should still have had to make an apology to you, but under what different circumstances! I will be as brief as I can. My father believed you the rightful heir to Moldwarp Hall. Your own father believed it, and made my father believe it—that was in case your uncle should leave no heir behind him. But your uncle was a strange man, and would neither lay claim to the property himself, nor allow you to be told of your prospects. He did

all he could to make you, like himself, indifferent to worldly things; and my father feared you would pride yourself on refusing to claim your rights, unless some counter-influence were used."

"But why should your father have taken any trouble in the matter?" I asked.

"Well, you know—one in his profession likes to see justice done; and, besides, to conduct such a case must, of course, be of professional advantage to him. You must not think him under obligation to the present family: my grandfather held the position he still occupies before they came into the property.—I am too unhappy to mind what I say now. My father was pleased when you and I—indeed I fancy he had a hand in our first meeting. But while your uncle lived he had to be cautious. Chance, however, seemed to favour his wishes. We met more than once, and you liked me, and my father thought I might wake you up to care about your rights, and—and—but—"

"I see. And it might have been, Clara, but for——"

"Only, you see, Mr. Cumbermede," she interrupted with a half-smile, and a little return of her playful manner—"*I* didn't wish it."

"No. You preferred the man who *had* the property."

It was a speech both cruel and rude. She stepped a pace back, and looked me proudly in the face.

Prefer that man to *you*, Wilfrid! No. I could never have fallen so low as that. But I confess I didn't mind letting papa understand that Mr. Brotherton was polite to me—just to keep him from urging me to—to—— You *will* do me the justice that I did not try to make you—to make you—care for me, Wilfrid?"

"I admit it heartily. I will be as honest as you, and confess that you might have done so —easily enough at one time. Indeed I am only half honest after all: I loved you once—after a boyish fashion."

She half smiled again. "I am glad you are believing me now," she said.

"Thoroughly," I answered. "When you speak the truth, I must believe you."

"I was afraid to let papa know the real state of things. I was always afraid of him, though I love him dearly, and he is very good to me. I dared not disappoint him by telling him that I loved Charley Osborne. That time—you remember—when we met in Switzerland, his strange ways interested me so much! I was only a girl—but——"

"I understand well enough. I don't wonder at any woman falling in love with my Charley."

"Thank you," she said, with a sigh which seemed to come from the bottom of her heart. "You were always generous. You will do what you can to right me with Charley—won't you? He is very strange sometimes."

"I will indeed. But, Clara, why didn't Charley let *me* know that you and he loved each other?"

"Ah! there my shame comes in again! I wanted—for my father's sake, not for my own—I need not tell you that—I wanted to keep my influence over you a little while—that is until I could gain my father's end. If I should succeed in rousing you to enter an

action for the recovery of your rights, I thought my father might then be reconciled to my marrying Charley instead——"

"Instead of me, Clara. Yes—I see. I begin to understand the whole thing. It's not so bad as I thought—not by any means."

"Oh, Wilfrid! how good of you! I shall love you next to Charley all my life."

She caught hold of my hand, and for a moment seemed on the point of raising it to her lips.

"But I can't easily get over the disgrace you have done me, Clara. Neither, I confess, can I get over your degrading yourself to a private interview with such a beast as I know—and can't help suspecting you knew Brotherton to be."

She dropped my hand, and hid her face in both her own.

"I did know what he was; but the thought of Charley made me able to go through with it."

"With the sacrifice of his friend to his enemy?"

"It was bad. It was horridly wicked. I hate myself for it. But you know I thought it would do you no harm in the end."

"How much did Charley know of it all?" I asked.

"Nothing whatever. How could I trust his innocence? He's the simplest creature in the world, Wilfrid."

"I know that well enough."

"I could not confess one atom of it to him. He would have blown up the whole scheme at once. It was all I could do to keep him from telling you of our engagement; and that made him miserable."

"Did you tell him I was in love with you? You knew I was, well enough."

"I dared not do that," she said, with a sad smile. "He would have vanished—would have killed himself to make way for you."

"I see you understand him, Clara."

"That will give me some feeble merit in your eyes—won't it, Wilfrid?"

"Still I don't see quite why you betrayed me

to Brotherton. I daresay I should if I had time to think it over."

"I wanted to put you in such a position with regard to the Brothertons that you could have no scruples in respect of them such as my father feared from what he called the over-refinement of your ideas of honour. The treatment you must receive would, I thought, rouse every feeling against them. But it was not *all* for my father's sake, Wilfrid. It was, however mistaken, yet a good deal for the sake of Charley's friend that I thus disgraced myself. Can you believe me?"

"I do. But nothing can wipe out the disgrace to me."

"The sword was your own. Of course I never for a moment doubted that."

"But they believed I was lying."

"I can't persuade myself it signifies greatly what such people think about you. I except Sir Giles. The rest are——"

"Yet you consented to visit them."

"I was in reality Sir Giles's guest. Not one of the others would have asked me."

"Not Geoffrey?"

"I owe *him* nothing but undying revenge for Charley."

Her eyes flashed through the darkness, and she looked as if she could have killed him.

"But you were plotting against Sir Giles all the time you were his guest?"

"Not unjustly, though. The property was not his, but yours—that is, as we then believed. As far as I knew, the result would have been a real service to him, in delivering him from unjust possession—a thing he would himself have scorned. It was all very wrong—very low, if you like—but somehow it then seemed simple enough—a lawful stratagem for the right."

"Your heart was so full of Charley!"

"Then you do forgive me, Wilfrid?"

"With all my soul. I hardly feel now as if I had anything to forgive."

I drew her towards me and kissed her on the forehead. She threw her arms round me, and clung to me, sobbing like a child.

"You will explain it all to Charley—won't you?" she said, as soon as she could speak, with

drawing herself from the arm which had involuntarily crept around her, seeking to comfort her.

"I will," I said.

We were startled by a sound in the clump of trees behind us. Then over their tops passed a wailful gust of wind, through which we thought came the fall of receding footsteps.

"I hope we haven't been overheard," I said. "I shall go at once and tell Charley all about it. I will just see you home first."

"There's no occasion for that, Wilfrid; and I'm sure I don't deserve it."

"You deserve a thousand thanks. You have lifted a mountain off me. I see it all now. When your father found it was no use——"

"Then I saw I had wronged you, and I couldn't bear myself till I had confessed all."

"Your father is satisfied, then, that the register would not stand in evidence?"

"Yes. He told me all about it."

"He has never said a word to me on the matter; but just dropped me in the dirt, and let me lie there."

"You must forgive him too, Wilfrid. It was a dreadful blow to him, and it was weeks before he told me. We couldn't think what was the matter with him. You see he had been cherishing the scheme ever since your father's death, and it was a great humiliation to find he had been sitting so many years on an addled egg," she said, with a laugh in which her natural merriment once more peeped out.

I walked home with her, and we parted like old friends.

On my way to the Temple I was anxiously occupied as to how Charley would receive the explanation I had to give him. That Clara's confession would be a relief I could not doubt; but it must cause him great pain notwithstanding. His sense of honour was so keen, and his ideal of womankind so lofty, that I could not but dread the consequences of the revelation. At the same time I saw how it might benefit him. I had begun to see that it is more divine to love the erring than to love the good, and to understand how there is more joy over the one than over the ninety and nine. If Charley, un-

derstanding that he is no divine lover, who loves only so long as he is able to flatter himself that the object of his love is immaculate, should find that he must love Clara in spite of her faults and wrong-doings, he might thus grow to be less despairful over his own failures; he might, through his love for Clara, learn to hope for himself, notwithstanding the awful distance at which perfection lay removed.

But as I went I was conscious of a strange oppression. It was not properly mental, for my interview with Clara had raised my spirits. It was a kind of physical oppression I felt, as if the air, which was in reality clear and cold, had been damp and close and heavy.

I went straight to Charley's chambers. The moment I opened the door, I knew that something was awfully wrong. The room was dark —but he would often sit in the dark. I called him, but received no answer. Trembling, I struck a light, for I feared to move lest I should touch something dreadful. But when I had succeeded in lighting the lamp, I found the room just as it always was. His hat was on

the table. He must be in his bedroom. And yet I did not feel as if anything alive was near me. Why was everything so frightfully still? I opened the door as slowly and fearfully as if I had dreaded arousing a sufferer whose life depended on his repose. There he lay on his bed, in his clothes—fast asleep, as I thought, for he often slept so, and at any hour of the day—the natural relief of his much-perturbed mind. His eyes were closed, and his face was very white. As I looked, I heard a sound—a drop—another! There was a slow drip somewhere. God in heaven! Could it be? I rushed to him, calling him aloud. There was no response. It was too true! He was dead. The long snake-like Indian dagger was in his heart, and the blood was oozing slowly from around it.

I dare not linger over that horrible night, or the horrible days that followed. Such days! such nights! The letters to write!—The friends to tell!—Clara!—His father!—The police!—The inquest!

* * * * * * *

Mr. Osborne took no notice of my letter, but came up at once. Entering where I sat with my head on my arms on the table, the first announcement I had of his presence was a hoarse deep broken voice ordering me out of the room. I obeyed mechanically, took up Charley's hat instead of my own, and walked away with it. But the neighbours were kind, and although I did not attempt to approach again all that was left of my friend, I watched from a neighbouring window, and following at a little distance, was present when they laid his form, late at night, in the unconsecrated ground of a cemetery.

I may just mention here what I had not the heart to dwell upon in the course of my narrative—that since the talk about suicide occasioned by the remarks of Sir Thomas Browne, he had often brought up the subject—chiefly, however, in a half-humorous tone, and from what may be called an æsthetic point of view as to the best mode of accomplishing it. For some of the usual modes he expressed abhorrence, as being so ugly; and on the whole considered—

I well remember the phrase, for he used it more than once—that a dagger—and on one of those occasions he took up the Indian weapon already described and said—"such as this now,"—was "the most gentleman-like usher into the presence of the Great Nothing." As I had, however, often heard that those who contemplated suicide never spoke of it, and as his manner on the occasions to which I refer was always merry, such talk awoke little uneasiness; and I believe that he never had at the moment any conscious attraction to the subject stronger than a speculative one. At the same time, however, I believe that the speculative attraction itself had its roots in the misery with which in other and prevailing moods he was so familiar.

## CHAPTER XII.

### ISOLATION.

AFTER writing to Mr. Osborne to acquaint him with the terrible event, the first thing I did was to go to Clara. I will not attempt to describe what followed. The moment she saw me, her face revealed, as in a mirror, the fact legible on my own, and I had scarcely opened my mouth when she cried "He is dead!" and fell fainting on the floor. Her aunt came, and we succeeded in recovering her a little. But she lay still as death on the couch where we had laid her, and the motion of her eyes hither and thither, as if following the movements of some one about the room, was the only sign of life in her. We spoke to her, but evidently she heard nothing; and at last, leaving her

when the doctor arrived, I waited for her aunt in another room, and told her what had happened.

Some days after, Clara sent for me, and I had to tell her the whole story. Then, with agony in every word she uttered, she managed to inform me that, when she went in after I had left her at the door that night, she found waiting her a note from Charley; and this she now gave me to read. It contained a request to meet him that evening at the very place which I had appointed. It was their customary rendezvous when she was in town. In all probability he was there when we were, and heard and saw—heard too little and saw too much, and concluded that both Clara and I were false to him. The frightful perturbation which a conviction such as that must cause in a mind like his could be nothing short of madness. For, ever tortured by a sense of his own impotence, of the gulf to all appearance eternally fixed between his actions and his aspirations, and unable to lay hold of the Essential, the Causing Goodness, he had clung, with the despair of a perish-

ing man, to the dim reflex of good he saw in her and me. If his faith in that was indeed destroyed, the last barrier must have given way, and the sea of madness ever breaking against it must have broken in and overwhelmed him. But oh, my friend! surely long ere now thou knowest that we were not false; surely the hour will yet dawn when I shall again hold thee to my heart; yea, surely, even if still thou countest me guilty, thou hast already found for me endless excuse and forgiveness.

I can hardly doubt, however, that he inherited a strain of madness from his father, a madness which that father had developed by forcing upon him the false forms of a true religion.

It is not then strange that I should have thought and speculated much about madness. —What does its frequent impulse to suicide indicate? May it not be its main instinct to destroy itself as an evil thing? May not the impulse arise from some unconscious conviction that there is for it no remedy but the shuffling off of this mortal coil—nature herself dimly urging through the fumes of the madness to

the one blow which lets in the light and air? Doubtless, if in the mind so sadly unhinged, the sense of a holy presence could be developed—the sense of a love that loves through all vagaries—of a hiding-place from forms of evil the most fantastic—of a fatherly care that not merely holds its insane child in its arms, but enters into the chaos of his imagination, and sees every wildest horror with which it swarms; if, I say, the conviction of such a love dawned on the disordered mind, the man would live in spite of his imaginary foes, for he would pray against them as sure of being heard as St. Paul when he prayed concerning the thorn from which he was not delivered, but against which he was sustained. And who can tell how often this may be the fact—how often the lunatic also lives by faith? Are not the forms of madness most frequently those of love and religion? Certainly, if there be a God, he does not forget his frenzied offspring; certainly he is more tender over them than any mother over her idiot darling; certainly he sees in them what the eye of brother or sister cannot see. But some of

them, at least, have not enough of such support to be able to go on living; and, for my part, I confess I rejoice as often as I hear that one has succeeded in breaking his prison bars. When the crystal shrine has grown dim, and the fair forms of nature are in their entrance contorted hideously; when the sunlight itself is as blue lightning, and the wind in the summer trees is as "a terrible sound of stones cast down, or a rebounding echo from the hollow mountains;" when the body is no longer a mediator between the soul and the world, but the prison-house of a lying gaoler and torturer—how can I but rejoice to hear that the tormented captive has at length forced his way out into freedom?

When I look behind me, I can see but little through the surging lurid smoke of that awful time. The first sense of relief came when I saw the body of Charley laid in the holy earth. For the earth *is* the Lord's—and none the less holy that the voice of the priest may have left it without his consecration. Surely if ever the Lord laughs in derision, as the Psalmist says, it must be when the voice of a man would in *his*

name exclude his fellows from their birthright. O Lord, gather thou the outcasts of thy Israel, whom the priests and the rulers of thy people have cast out to perish.

I remember for the most part only a dull agony, interchanging with apathy. For days and days I could not rest, but walked hither and thither, careless whither. When at length I would lie down weary and fall asleep, suddenly I would start up, hearing the voice of Charley crying for help, and rush in the middle of the Winter night into the wretched streets, there to wander till daybreak. But I was not utterly miserable. In my most wretched dreams I never dreamed of Mary, and through all my waking distress I never forgot her. I was sure in my very soul that she did me no injustice. I had laid open the deepest in me to her honest gaze, and she had read it, and could not but know me. Neither did what had occurred quench my growing faith. I had never been able to hope much for Charley in this world; for something was out of joint with him, and only in the region of the unknown was I able

to look for the setting right of it. Nor had many weeks passed before I was fully aware of relief when I remembered that he was dead. And whenever the thought arose that God might have given him a fairer chance in this world, I was able to reflect that apparently God does not care for this world save as a part of the whole; and on that whole I had yet to discover that he could have given him a fairer chance.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### ATTEMPTS AND COINCIDENCES.

IT was months before I could resume my work. Not until Charley's absence was, as it were, so far established and accepted that hope had begun to assert itself against memory; that is, not until the form of Charley ceased to wander with despairful visage behind me and began to rise amongst the silvery mists before me, was I able to invent once more, or even to guide the pen with certainty over the paper. The moment, however, that I took the pen in my hand another necessity seized me.

Although Mary had hardly been out of my thoughts, I had heard no word of her since her brother's death. I dared not write to her father or mother after the way the former had behav-

ed to me, and I shrunk from approaching Mary with a word that might suggest a desire to intrude the thoughts of myself upon the sacredness of her grief. Why should she think of me? Sorrow has ever something of a divine majesty, before which one must draw nigh with bowed head and bated breath:

> Here I and sorrows sit;
> Here is my throne: bid kings come bow to it.

But the moment I took the pen in my hand to write, an almost agonizing desire to speak to her laid hold of me. I dared not yet write to her, but, after reflection, resolved to send her some verses which should make her think of both Charley and myself, through the pages of a magazine which I knew she read.

> Oh, look not on the heart I bring—
> It is too low and poor;
> I would not have thee love a thing
> Which I can ill endure.
>
> Nor love me for the sake of what
> I would be if I could;
> O'er peaks as o'er the marshy flat,
> Still soars the sky of good.

See, love, afar, the heavenly man
The will of God would make;
The thing I must be when I can,
Love now, for faith's dear sake.

But when I had finished the lines, I found the expression had fallen so far short of what I had in my feeling, that I could not rest satisfied with such an attempt at communication. I walked up and down the room, thinking of the awful theories regarding the state of mind at death in which Mary had been trained. As to the mere suicide, love ever finds refuge in presumed madness; but all of her school believed that at the moment of dissolution the fate is eternally fixed either for bliss or woe, determined by the one or the other of two vaguely defined attitudes of the mental being towards certain propositions; concerning which attitudes they were at least right in asserting that no man could of himself assume the safe one. The thought became unendurable that Mary should believe that Charley was damned—and that for ever and ever. I must and would write to her, come of it what might. That my Charley,

whose suicide came of misery that the painful flutterings of his half-born wings would not bear him aloft into the empyrean, should appear to my Athanasia lost in an abyss of irrecoverable woe; that she should think of God as sending forth his spirit to sustain endless wickedness for endless torture;—it was too frightful. As I wrote, the fire burned and burned, and I ended only from despair of utterance. Not a word can I now recall of what I wrote:—the strength of my feelings must have paralyzed the grasp of my memory. All I can recollect is that I closed with the expression of a passionate hope that the God who had made me and my Charley to love each other, would somewhere, some day, somehow, when each was grown stronger and purer, give us once more to each other. In that hope alone, I said, was it possible for me to live. By return of post I received the following:—

"SIR,

"After having everlastingly ruined one of my children, body and soul, for *your* sophisms will hardly alter the decrees of divine justice,

once more you lay your snares—now to drag my sole remaining child into the same abyss of perdition. Such wickedness—wickedness even to the pitch of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost—I have never in the course of a large experience of impenitence found paralleled. It almost drives me to the belief that the enemy of souls is still occasionally permitted to take up his personal abode in the heart of him who wilfully turns aside from revealed truth. I forgive you for the ruin you have brought upon our fondest hopes, and the agony with which you have torn the hearts of those who more than life loved him of whom you falsely called yourself the friend. But I fear you have already gone too far ever to feel your need of that forgiveness which alone can avail you. Yet I say—Repent, for the mercy of the Lord is infinite. Though my boy is lost to me for ever, I should yet rejoice to see the instrument of his ruin plucked as a brand from the burning.

"Your obedient well-wisher,

"CHARLES OSBORNE.

"P.S.—I retain your letter for the sake of my

less experienced brethren, that I may be able to afford an instance of how far the unregenerate mind can go in its antagonism to the God of Revelation."

I breathed a deep breath, and laid the letter down, mainly concerned as to whether Mary had had the chance of reading mine. I could believe any amount of tyranny in her father—even to perusing and withholding her letters; but in this I may do him injustice, for there is no common ground known to me from which to start in speculating upon his probable actions. I wrote in answer something nearly as follows:—

"SIR,

"That you should do me injustice can by this time be no matter of surprise to me. Had I the slightest hope of convincing you of the fact, I should strain every mental nerve to that end. But no one can labour without hope, and as in respect of *your* justice I have none, I will be silent. May the God in whom I trust con-

vince you of the cruelty of which you have been guilty: the God in whom you profess to believe, must be too like yourself to give any ground of such hope from him.

"Your obedient servant,

"WILFRID CUMBERMEDE."

If Mary had read my letter, I felt assured her reading had been very different from her father's. Anyhow she could not judge me as he did, for she knew me better. She knew that for Charley's sake I had tried the harder to believe myself.

But the reproaches of one who had been so unjust to his own son could not weigh very heavily on me, and I now resumed my work with a tolerable degree of calmness. But I wrote badly. I should have done better to go down to the Moat, and be silent. If my reader has ever seen what I wrote at that time, I should like her to know that I now wish it all unwritten—not for any utterance contained in it, but simply for its general inferiority.

Certainly work is not always required of a

man. There is such a thing as a sacred idleness, the cultivation of which is now fearfully neglected. Abraham, seated in his tent door in the heat of the day, would be to the philosophers of the nineteenth century an object for uplifted hands and pointed fingers. They would see in him only the indolent Arab, whom nothing but the foolish fancy that he saw his maker in the distance, could rouse to run.

It was clearly better to attempt no further communication with Mary at present; and I could think but of one person from whom, without giving pain, I might hope for some information concerning her.

* * * * * * *

Here I had written a detailed account of how I contrived to meet Miss Pease, but it is not of consequence enough to my story to be allowed to remain. Suffice it to mention that one morning at length I caught sight of her in a street in Mayfair, where the family was then staying for the season, and overtaking addressed her.

She started, stared at me for a moment, and held out her hand.

"I didn't know you, Mr. Cumbermede. How much older you look! I beg your pardon. Have you been ill?"

She spoke hurriedly, and kept looking over her shoulder now and then, as if afraid of being seen talking to me.

"I have had a good deal to make me older since we met last, Miss Pease," I said. "I have hardly a friend left in the world but you—that is, if you will allow me to call you one."

"Certainly, certainly," she answered, but hurriedly, and with one of those uneasy glances. "Only you must allow, Mr. Cumbermede, that —that—that——"

The poor lady was evidently unprepared to meet me on the old footing, and, at the same time, equally unwilling to hurt my feelings.

"I should be sorry to make you run a risk for my sake," I said. "Please just answer me one question. Do you know what it is to be

misunderstood—to be despised without deserving it?"

She smiled sadly, and nodded her head gently two or three times.

"Then have pity on me, and let me have a little talk with you."

Again she glanced apprehensively over her shoulder.

"You are afraid of being seen with me, and I don't wonder," I said.

"Mr. Geoffrey came up with us," she answered. "I left him at breakfast. He will be going across the park to his club directly."

"Then come with me the other way—into Hyde Park," I said.

With evident reluctance, she yielded and accompanied me.

As soon as we got within Stanhope Gate, I spoke.

"A certain sad event, of which you have no doubt heard, Miss Pease, has shut me out from all communication with the family of my friend Charley Osborne. I am very anxious for some news of his sister. She is all that is left of

him to me now. Can you tell me anything about her?"

"She has been very ill," she replied.

"I hope that means that she is better," I said.

"She is better, and, I hear, going on the Continent, as soon as the season will permit. But, Mr. Cumbermede, you must be aware that I am under considerable restraint in talking to you. The position I hold in Sir Giles's family, although neither a comfortable nor a dignified one——"

"I understand you perfectly, Miss Pease," I returned, "and fully appreciate the sense of propriety which causes your embarrassment. But the request I am about to make has nothing to do with them or their affairs whatever. I only want your promise to let me know if you hear anything of Miss Osborne."

"I cannot tell—what——"

"What use I may be going to make of the information you give me. In a word, you do not trust me."

"I neither trust nor distrust you, Mr. Cum-

bermede. But I am afraid of being drawn into a correspondence with you."

"Then I will ask no promise. I will hope in your generosity. Here is my address. I pray you, as you would have helped him who fell among thieves, to let me know anything you hear about Mary Osborne."

She took my card, and turned at once, saying,

"Mind, I make no promise."

"I imagine none," I answered. "I will trust in your kindness."

And so we parted.

Unsatisfactory as the interview was, it yet gave me a little hope. I was glad to hear that Mary was going abroad, for it must do her good. For me, I would endure and labour and hope. I gave her to God, as Shakspere says somewhere, and set myself to my work. When her mind was quieter about Charley, somehow or other I might come near her again.—I could not see how.

I took my way across the Green Park.

I do not believe we notice the half of the

coincidences that float past us on the stream of events. Things which would fill us with astonishment, and probably with foreboding, look us in the face and pass us by, and we know nothing of them.

As I walked along in the direction of the Mall, I became aware of a tall man coming towards me, stooping, as if with age, while the length of his stride indicated a more vigorous period. He passed without lifting his head, but, in the partial view of the wan and furrowed countenance, I could not fail to recognize Charley's father. Such a worn unhappiness was there depicted that the indignation which still lingered in my bosom went out in compassion. If his sufferings might but teach him that to brand the truth of the kingdom with the private mark of opinion must result in persecution and cruelty! He mounted the slope with strides at once eager and aimless, and I wondered whether any of the sure-coming compunctions had yet begun to overshadow the complacency of his faith; whether he had yet begun to doubt if it pleased the Son of Man

that a youth should be driven from the gates of truth because he failed to recognize her image in the faces of the janitors.

Aimless also, I turned into the Mall, and again I started at the sight of a known figure. Was it possible?—could it be my Lilith betwixt the shafts of a public cabriolet? Fortunately it was empty. I hailed it, and jumped up, telling the driver to take me to my chambers.

My poor Lilith! She was working like one who had never been loved! So far as I knew she had never been in harness before. She was badly groomed and thin, but much of her old spirit remained. I soon entered into negotiations with the driver, whose property she was, and made her my own once more, with a delight I could ill express in plain prose—for my friends were indeed few. I wish I could draw a picture of the lovely creature, when at length, having concluded my bargain, I approached her, and called her by her name! She turned her head sideways towards me with a low whinny of pleasure, and when I walked a

little away, walked wearily after me. I took her myself to livery stables near me, and wrote for Styles. His astonishment when he saw her was amusing.

"Good Lord! Miss Lilith!" was all he could say—for some moments.

In a few days she had begun to look like herself, and I sent her home with Styles. I should hardly like to say how much the recovery of her did to restore my spirits; I could not help regarding it as a good omen.

And now, the first bitterness of my misery having died a natural death, I sought again some of the friends I had made through Charley, and experienced from them great kindness. I began also to go into society a little, for I had found that invention is ever ready to lose the forms of life, if it be not kept under the ordinary pressure of its atmosphere. As it is, I doubt much if any of my books are more than partially true to those forms, for I have ever heeded them too little; but I believe I have been true to the heart of man. At the same time, I have ever regarded that heart more as

the fountain of aspiration than the grave of fruition. The discomfiture of enemies and a happy marriage never seemed to me ends of sufficient value to close a history withal—I mean a fictitious history, wherein one may set forth joys and sorrows which in a real history must walk shadowed under the veil of modesty; for the soul, still less than the body, will consent to be revealed to all eyes. Hence, although most of my books have seemed true to some, they have all seemed visionary to most.

A year passed away, during which I never left London. I heard from Miss Pease—that Miss Osborne, although much better, was not going to return until after another Winter. I wrote and thanked her, and heard no more. It may seem I accepted such ignorance with strange indifference; but, even to the reader for whom alone I am writing, I cannot, as things are, attempt to lay open all my heart. I have not written and cannot write how I thought, projected, brooded, and dreamed—all about *her;* how I hoped when I wrote that she might read;

how I questioned what I had written, to find whether it would look to her what I had intended it to appear.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE LAST VISION.

I HAD engaged to accompany one of Charley's barrister-friends, in whose society I had found considerable satisfaction, to his father's house—to spend the evening with some friends of the family. The gathering was chiefly for talk, and was a kind of thing I disliked, finding its aimlessness and flicker depressing. Indeed, partly from the peculiar circumstances of my childhood, partly from what I had suffered, I always found my spirits highest when alone. Still, the study of humanity apart, I felt that I ought not to shut myself out from my kind, but endure some little irksomeness, if only for the sake of keeping alive that surface friendliness which has its value in the nourishment of the

deeper affections. On this particular occasion, however, I yielded the more willingly that, in the revival of various memories of Charley, it had occurred to me that I once heard him say that his sister had a regard for one of the ladies of the family.

There were not many people in the drawing-room when we arrived, and my friend's mother alone was there to entertain them. With her I was chatting when one of her daughters entered, accompanied by a lady in mourning. For one moment I felt as if on the borders of insanity. My brain seemed to surge like the waves of a wind-tormented tide, so that I dared not make a single step forward lest my limbs should disobey me. It was indeed Mary Osborne; but oh, how changed! The rather full face had grown delicate and thin, and the fine pure complexion if possible finer and purer, but certainly more ethereal and evanescent. It was as if suffering had removed some substance unapt,* and rendered her body a better-fitting garment for her soul. Her face, which had be-

* Spenser's "Hymne in Honour of Beautie."

fore required the softening influences of sleep and dreams to give it the plasticity necessary for complete expression, was now full of a repressed expression, if I may be allowed the phrase—a latent something ever on the tremble, ever on the point of breaking forth. It was as if the nerves had grown finer, more tremulous, or, rather, more vibrative. Touched to finer issues they could never have been, but suffering had given them a more responsive thrill. In a word, she was the Athanasia of my dream, not the Mary Osborne of the Moldwarp library.

Conquering myself at last, and seeing a favourable opportunity, I approached her. I think the fear lest her father should enter gave me the final impulse; otherwise I could have been contented to gaze on her for hours in motionless silence.

"May I speak to you, Mary?" I said.

She lifted her eyes and her whole face towards mine, without a smile, without a word. Her features remained perfectly still, but, like the outbreak of a fountain, the tears rushed into her eyes and overflowed in silent weeping. Not a

sob, not a convulsive movement, accompanied their flow.

"Is your father here?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"I thought you were abroad somewhere—I did not know where."

Again she shook her head. She dared not speak, knowing that if she made the attempt she must break down.

"I will go away till you can bear the sight of me," I said.

She half-stretched out a thin white hand, but whether to detain me or bid me farewell I do not know, for it dropped again on her knee.

"I will come to you by-and-by," I said, and moved away.

The rooms rapidly filled, and in a few minutes I could not see the corner where I had left her. I endured everything for awhile, and then made my way back to it; but she was gone, and I could find her nowhere. A lady began to sing. When the applause which followed her performance was over, my friend, who happened to be near me, turned abruptly and said,

"Now, Cumbermede, *you* sing."

The truth was that, since I had loved Mary Osborne, I had attempted to cultivate a certain small gift of song which I thought I possessed. I dared not touch any existent music, for I was certain I should break down; but having a faculty—somewhat thin, I fear—for writing songs, and finding that a shadowy air always accompanied the birth of the words, I had presumed to study music a little, in the hope of becoming able to fix the melody—the twin sister of the song. I had made some progress, and had grown able to write down a simple thought. There was little presumption, then, in venturing my voice, limited as was its scope, upon a trifle of my own. Tempted by the opportunity of realizing hopes consciously wild, I obeyed my friend, and, sitting down to the instrument in some trepidation, sang the following verses:—

I dreamed that I woke from a dream,
  And the house was full of light;
At the window two angel Sorrows
  Held back the curtains of night.

The door was wide, and the house
  Was full of the morning wind;
At the door two armed warders
  Stood silent, with faces blind.

I ran to the open door,
  For the wind of the world was sweet;
The warders with crossing weapons
  Turned back my issuing feet.

I ran to the shining windows—
  There the winged Sorrows stood;
Silent they held the curtains,
  And the light fell through in a flood.

I clomb to the highest window—
  Ah! there, with shadowed brow,
Stood one lonely radiant Sorrow,
  And that, my love, was thou.

I could not have sung this in public, but that no one would suspect it was my own, or was in the least likely to understand a word of it—except her for whose ears and heart it was intended.

As soon as I had finished, I rose, and once more went searching for Mary. But as I looked, sadly fearing she was gone, I heard her voice close behind me.

"Are those verses your own, Mr. Cumbermede?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

I turned trembling. Her lovely face was looking up at me.

"Yes," I answered—"as much my own as that I believe they are not to be found anywhere. But they were given to me rather than made by me."

"Would you let me have them? I am not sure that I understand them."

"I am not sure that I understand them myself. They are for the heart rather than the mind. Of course you shall have them. They were written for you. All I have, all I am is yours."

Her face flushed, and grew pale again instantly.

"You must not talk so," she said. "Remember."

"I can never forget. I do not know why you say *remember*."

"On second thoughts, I must not have the verses. I beg your pardon."

"Mary, you bewilder me. I have no right to

ask you to explain, except that you speak as if I must understand. What have they been telling you about me?"

"Nothing—at least nothing that——"

She paused.

"I try to live innocently, and were it only for your sake, shall never stop searching for the thread of life in its ravelled skein."

"Do not say for *my* sake, Mr. Cumbermede. That means nothing. Say for your own sake, if not for God's."

"If *you* are going to turn away from me, I don't mind how soon I follow Charley."

All this was said in a half-whisper, I bending towards her where she sat, a little sheltered by one of a pair of folding doors. My heart was like to break—or rather it seemed to have vanished out of me altogether, lost in a gulf of emptiness. Was this all? Was this the end of my dreaming? To be thus pushed aside by the angel of my resurrection?

"Hush! hush!" she said kindly. "You must have many friends. But——"

"But you will be my friend no more? Is

that it, Mary? Oh, if you knew all! And you are never, never to know it!"

Her still face was once more streaming with tears. I choked mine back, terrified at the thought of being observed; and without even offering my hand, left her and made my way through the crowd to the stair. On the landing I met Geoffrey Brotherton. We stared each other in the face, and passed.

I did not sleep much that night, and when I did sleep, woke from one wretched dream after another, now crying aloud, and now weeping. What could I have done? or rather, what could any one have told her I had done to make her behave thus to me? She did not look angry—or even displeased—only sorrowful, very sorrowful; and she seemed to take it for granted I knew what it meant. When at length I finally woke after an hour of less troubled sleep, I found some difficulty in convincing myself that the real occurrences of the night before had not been one of the many troubled dreams that had scared my repose. Even after the dreams had all vanished, and the facts remain-

ed, they still appeared more like a dim dream of the dead—the vision of Mary was so wan and hopeless, memory alone looking out from her worn countenance. There had been no warmth in her greeting, no resentment in her aspect; we met as if we had parted but an hour before, only that an open grave was between us, across which we talked in the voices of dreamers. She had sought to raise no barrier between us, just because we *could* not meet, save as one of the dead and one of the living. What could it mean? But with the growing day awoke a little courage. I would at least try to find out what it meant. Surely *all* my dreams were not to vanish like the mist of the morning! To lose my dreams would be far worse than to lose the so-called realities of life. What were these to me? What value lay in such reality? Even God was as yet so dim and far off as to seem rather in the region of dreams—of those true dreams, I hoped, that shadow forth the real—than in the actual visible present. "Still," I said to myself, "she had not cast me off; she did not refuse to know

me; she did ask for my song, and I will send it."

I wrote it out, adding a stanza to the verses:—

> I bowed my head before her,
> And stood trembling in the light;
> She dropped the heavy curtain,
> And the house was full of night.

I then sought my friend's chambers.

"I was not aware you knew the Osbornes," I said. "I wonder you never told me, seeing Charley and you were such friends."

"I never saw one of them till last night. My sister and she knew each other some time ago, and have met again of late. What a lovely creature she is! But what became of you last night? You must have left before any one else."

"I didn't feel well."

"You don't look the thing."

"I confess meeting Miss Osborne rather upset me."

"It had the same effect on her. She was quite ill, my sister said, this morning. No won-

der! Poor Charley! I always had a painful feeling that he would come to grief somehow."

"Let's hope he's come to something else by this time, Marston," I said.

"Amen," he returned.

"Is her father or mother with her?"

"No. They are to fetch her away—next week, I think it is."

I had now no fear of my communication falling into other hands, and therefore sent the song by post, with a note, in which I begged her to let me know if I had done anything to offend her. Next morning I received the following reply:

"No, Wilfrid—for Charley's sake, I must call you by your name—you have done nothing to offend me. Thank you for the song. I did not want you to send it, but I will keep it. You must not write to me again. Do not forget what we used to write about. God's ways are not ours. Your friend, Mary Osborne."

I rose and went out, not knowing whither. Half-stunned, I roamed the streets. I ate no-

thing that day, and when towards night I found myself near my chambers, I walked in as I had come out, having no intent, no future. I felt very sick, and threw myself on my bed. There I passed the night, half in sleep, half in a helpless prostration. When I look back, it seems as if some spiritual narcotic must have been given me, else how should the terrible time have passed and left me alive? When I came to myself, I found I was ill, and I longed to hide my head in the nest of my childhood. I had always looked on the Moat as my refuge at the last; now it seemed the only desirable thing—a lonely nook, in which to lie down and end the dream there begun—either, as it now seemed, in an eternal sleep, or the inburst of a dreary light. After the last refuge it could afford me it must pass from my hold; but I was yet able to determine whither. I rose and went to Marston.

"Marston," I said, "I want to make my will."

"All right!" he returned; "but you look as if you meant to register it as well. You've got a

feverish cold; I see it in your eyes. Come along. I'll go home with you, and fetch a friend of mine, who will give you something to do you good."

"I can't rest till I have made my will," I persisted.

"Well, there's no harm in that," he rejoined. "It won't take long, I dare say."

"It needn't anyhow. I only want to leave the small real property I have to Miss Osborne, and the still smaller personal property to yourself."

He laughed.

"All right, old boy! I haven't the slightest objection to your willing your traps to me, but every objection in the world to your *leaving* them. To be sure, every man, with anything to leave, ought to make his will betimes;—so fire away."

In a little while the draught was finished.

"I shall have it ready for your signature by to-morrow," he said.

I insisted it should be done at once. I was going home, I said. He yielded. The will

was engrossed, signed, and witnessed that same morning; and in the afternoon I set out, the first part of the journey by rail, for the Moat.

## CHAPTER XV.

### ANOTHER DREAM.

THE excitement of having something to do had helped me over the morning, and the pleasure of thinking of what I had done helped me through half the journey; but before I reached home I was utterly exhausted. Then I had to drive round by the farm, and knock up Mrs. Herbert and Styles.

I could not bear the thought of my own room, and ordered a fire in my grandmother's, where they soon got me into bed. All I remember of that night is the following dream.

I found myself at the entrance of the ice-cave. A burning sun beat on my head, and at my feet flowed the brook which gathered its life from the decay of the ice. I stooped to drink;

but, cool to the eye and hand and lips, it yet burned me within like fire. I would seek shelter from the sun inside the cave. I entered, and knew that the cold was all around me; I even felt it; but somehow it did not enter into me. My brain, my very bones, burned with fire. I went in and in. The blue atmosphere closed around me, and the colour entered into my soul till it seemed dyed with the potent blue. My very being swam and floated in a blue atmosphere of its own. My intention—I can recall it perfectly—was but to walk to the end, a few yards, then turn and again brave the sun; for I had a dim feeling of forsaking my work, of playing truant, or of being cowardly in thus avoiding the heat. Something else too was wrong, but I could not clearly tell what. As I went on, I began to wonder that I had not come to the end. The grey walls yet rose about me, and ever the film of dissolution flowed along their glassy faces to the runnel below; still before me opened the depth of blue atmosphere, deepening as I went. After many windings, the path began to branch, and soon I was lost

in a labyrinth of passages, of which I knew not why I should choose one rather than another. It was useless now to think of returning. Arbitrarily I chose the narrowest way, and still went on.

A discoloration of the ice attracted my attention, and as I looked it seemed to retreat into the solid mass. There was something not ice within it, which grew more and more distinct as I gazed, until at last I plainly distinguished the form of my grandmother lying as then when my aunt made me touch her face. A few yards further on lay the body of my uncle, as I saw him in his coffin. His face was dead white in the midst of the cold clear ice, his eyes closed, and his arms straight by his side. He lay like an alabaster king upon his tomb. It *was* he, I thought, but he would never speak to me more —never look at me—never more awake. There lay all that was left of him—the cold frozen memory of what he had been, and would never be again. I did not weep. I only knew somehow in my dream that life was all a wandering in a frozen cave, where the faces of the living

were dark with the coming corruption, and the memories of the dead, cold and clear and hopeless evermore, alone were lovely.

I walked further; for the ice might possess yet more of the past—all that was left me of life. And again I stood and gazed, for, deep within, I saw the form of Charley—at rest now, his face bloodless, but not so death-like as my uncle's. His hands were laid palm to palm over his bosom, and pointed upwards, as if praying for comfort where comfort was none: here at least were no flickerings of the rainbow fancies of faith and hope and charity! I gazed in comfortless content for a time on the repose of my weary friend, and then went on, inly moved to see what further the ice of the godless region might hold. Nor had I wandered far when I saw the form of Mary, lying like the rest, only that her hands were crossed on her bosom. I stood, wondering to find myself so little moved. But when the ice drew nigh me, and would have closed around me, my heart leaped for joy; and when the heat of my lingering life repelled it, my heart sunk within

me, and I said to myself: "Death will not have me. I may not join her even in the land of cold forgetfulness: I may not even be nothing *with* her." The tears began to flow down my face, like the thin veil of water that kept ever flowing down the face of the ice; and as I wept, the water before me flowed faster and faster, till it rippled in a sheet down the icy wall. Faster and yet faster it flowed, falling, with the sound as of many showers, into the runnel below, which rushed splashing and gurgling away from the foot of the vanishing wall. Faster and faster it flowed, until the solid mass fell in a foaming cataract, and swept in a torrent across the cave. I followed the retreating wall, through the seething water at its foot. Thinner and thinner grew the dividing mass; nearer and nearer came the form of my Mary. "I shall yet clasp her," I cried; "her dead form will kill me, and I too shall be inclosed in the friendly ice. I shall not be with her, alas! but neither shall I be without her, for I shall depart into the lovely nothingness." Thinner and thinner grew the dividing wall. The skirt of

her shroud hung like a wet weed in the falling torrent. I kneeled in the river, and crept nearer, with outstretched arms: when the vanishing ice set the dead form free, it should rest in those arms—the last gift of the life-dream—for then, surely, I *must* die. "Let me pass in the agony of a lonely embrace!" I cried. As I spoke she moved. I started to my feet, stung into life by the agony of a new hope. Slowly the ice released her, and gently she rose to her feet. The torrents of water ceased—they had flowed but to set her free. Her eyes were still closed, but she made one blind step towards me, and laid her left hand on my head, her right hand on my heart. Instantly, body and soul, I was cool as a Summer eve after a thunder-shower. For a moment, precious as an æon, she held her hands upon me—then slowly opened her eyes. Out of them flashed the living soul of my Athanasia. She closed the lids again slowly over the lovely splendour; the water in which we stood rose around us; and on its last billow she floated away through the winding passage of the cave. I sought to follow

her, but could not. I cried aloud and awoke.

But the burning heat had left me; I felt that I had passed a crisis, and had begun to recover —a conviction which would have been altogether unwelcome, but for the poor shadow of a reviving hope which accompanied it. Such a dream, come whence it might, could not but bring comfort with it. The hope grew, and was my sole medicine.

Before the evening I felt better, and, though still very feeble, managed to write to Marston, letting him know I was safe, and requesting him to forward any letters that might arrive.

The next day, I rose, but was unable to work. The very thought of writing sickened me. Neither could I bear the thought of returning to London. I tried to read, but threw aside book after book, without being able to tell what one of them was about. If for a moment I seemed to enter into the subject, before I reached the bottom of the page, I found I had not an idea as to what the words meant or whither they tended. After many failures, unwilling to give myself up to idle brooding, I

fortunately tried some of the mystical poetry of the seventeenth century. The difficulties of that I found rather stimulate than repel me; while, much as there was in the form to displease the taste, there was more in the matter to rouse the intellect. I found also some relief in resuming my mathematical studies: the abstraction of them acted as an anodyne. But the days dragged wearily.

As soon as I was able to get on horseback, the tone of mind and body began to return. I felt as if into me some sort of animal healing passed from Lilith; and who can tell in how many ways the lower animals may not minister to the higher?

One night I had a strange experience. I give it without argument, perfectly aware that the fact may be set down to the disordered state of my physical nature, and that without injustice.

I had not for a long time thought about one of the questions which had so much occupied Charley and myself—that of immortality. As to any communication between the parted, I

had never, during his life, pondered the possibility of it, although I had always had an inclination to believe that such intercourse had in rare instances taken place. Former periods of the world's history, when that blinding self-consciousness which is the bane of ours was yet undeveloped, must, I thought, have been far more favourable to its occurrence. Anyhow I was convinced that it was not to be gained by effort. I confess that, in the unthinking agony of grief after Charley's death, many a time when I woke in the middle of the night and could sleep no more, I sat up in bed and prayed him, if he heard me, to come to me, and let me tell him the truth—for my sake to let me know, at least, that he lived, for then I should be sure that one day all would be well. But if there was any hearing, there was no answer. Charley did not come; the prayer seemed to vanish in the darkness; and my more self-possessed meditations never justified the hope of any such being heard.

One night I was sitting in my grannie's room, which, except my uncle's, was now the only one

I could bear to enter. I had been reading for some time very quietly, but had leaned back in my chair, and let my thoughts go wandering whither they would, when all at once I was possessed by the conviction that Charley was near me. I saw nothing, heard nothing; of the recognized senses of humanity not one gave me a hint of a presence; and yet my whole body was aware—so, at least, it seemed—of the proximity of another *I*. It was as if some nervous region commensurate with my frame, were now for the first time revealed by contact with an object suitable for its apprehension. Like Eliphaz, I felt the hair of my head stand up—not from terror, but simply, as it seemed, from the presence and its strangeness. Like others also of whom I have read, who believed themselves in the presence of the disembodied, I could not speak. I tried, but as if the medium for sound had been withdrawn, and an empty gulf lay around me, no word followed, although my very soul was full of the cry—*Charley! Charley!* And alas! in a few moments, like the faint vanishing of an unreal-

ized thought, leaving only the assurance that something half-born from out the unknown had been there, the influence faded and died. It passed from me like the shadow of a cloud, and once more I knew but my poor lonely self, returning to its candles, its open book, its burning fire.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE DARKEST HOUR.

SUFFERING is perhaps the only preparation for suffering: still I was but poorly prepared for what followed.

Having gathered strength, and a certain quietness which I could not mistake for peace, I returned to London towards the close of the Spring. I had in the interval heard nothing of Mary. The few letters Marston had sent on had been almost exclusively from my publishers. But the very hour I reached my lodging, came a note, which I opened trembling, for it was in the handwriting of Miss Pease.

"DEAR SIR,—I cannot, I think, be wrong in giving you a piece of information which will be

in the newspapers to-morrow morning. Your old acquaintance, and my young relative, Mr. Brotherton, was married this morning, at St. George's, Hanover Square, to your late friend's sister, Miss Mary Osborne. They have just left for Dover on their way to Switzerland.

"Your sincere well-wisher,

"JANE PEASE."

Even at this distance of time, I should have to exhort myself to write with calmness, were it not that the utter despair of conveying my feelings, if indeed my soul had not for the time passed beyond feeling into some abyss unknown to human consciousness, renders it unnecessary. This despair of communication has two sources —the one simply the conviction of the impossibility of expressing *any* feeling, much more such feeling as mine then was—and is; the other the conviction that only to the heart of love can the sufferings of love speak. The attempt of a lover to move, by the presentation of his own suffering, the heart of her who loves him not, is as unavailing as it is unmanly. The poet

who sings most wailfully of the torments of the lover's hell, is but a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal in the ears of her who has at best only a general compassion to meet the song withal—possibly only an individual vanity which crowns her with his woes as with the trophies of a conquest. True, he is understood and worshipped by all the other wailful souls in the first infernal circle, as one of the great men of their order—able to put into words full of sweet torment the dire hopelessness of their misery; but for such the singer, singing only for ears eternally deaf to his song, cares nothing; or if for a moment he receives consolation from their sympathy, it is but a passing weakness which the breath of an indignant self-condemnation—even contempt, the next moment sweeps away. In God alone there must be sympathy and cure; but I had not then—have I indeed yet found what that cure is? I am at all events now able to write with calmness. If suffering destroyed itself, as some say, mine ought to have disappeared long ago; but to that I can neither pretend nor confess.

For the first time, after all I had encountered, I knew what suffering could be. It is still at moments an agony as of hell to recall this and the other thought that then stung me like a white-hot arrow: the shafts have long been drawn out, but the barbed heads are still there. I neither stormed nor maddened. I only felt a freezing hand lay hold of my heart, and gripe it closer and closer till I should have sickened, but that the pain ever stung me into fresh life; and ever since I have gone about the world with that hard lump somewhere in my bosom into which the griping hand and the griped heart have grown and stiffened.

I fled at once back to my solitary house, looking for no relief in its solitude, only the negative comfort of escaping the eyes of men. I could not bear the sight of my fellow-creatures. To say that the world had grown black to me, is as nothing: I ceased—I will not say *to believe* in God, for I never dared say that mighty thing—but I ceased to hope in God. The universe had grown a negation which yet forced its presence upon me—a death that bred

worms. If there were a God anywhere, this universe could be nothing more than his forsaken moth-eaten garment. He was a God who did not care. Order was all an invention of phosphorescent human brains; light itself the mocking smile of a Jupiter over his writhing sacrifices. At times I laughed at the tortures of my own heart, saying to it, "Writhe on, worm; thou deservest thy writhing in that thou writhest. Godless creature, why dost thou not laugh with me? Am I not merry over thee and the world—in that ye are both rottenness to the core?" The next moment my heart and I would come together with a shock, and I knew it was myself that scorned myself.

Such being my mood, it will cause no surprise if I say that I too was tempted to suicide; the wonder would have been if it had been otherwise. The soft keen curves of that fatal dagger, which had not only slain Charley but all my hopes—for had he lived this horror could not have been—grew almost lovely in my eyes. Until now it had looked cruel, fiendish, hateful; but now I would lay it before me and contem-

plate it. In some griefs there is a wonderful power of self-contemplation, which indeed forms their only solace; the moment it can set the sorrow away from itself sufficiently to regard it, the tortured heart begins to repose; but suddenly, like a waking tiger, the sorrow leaps again into its lair, and the agony commences anew. The dagger was the type of my grief and its torture: might it not, like the brazen serpent, be the cure for the sting of its living counterpart? But alas! where was the certainty? Could I slay *myself?* This outer breathing form I could dismiss—but the pain was not *there.* I was not mad, and I knew that a deeper death than that could give, at least than I had any assurance that could give, alone could bring repose. For, impossible as I had always found it actually to believe in immortality, I now found it equally impossible to believe in annihilation. And even if annihilation should be the final result, who could tell but it might require ages of a horrible slow-decaying dream-consciousness to kill the living thing which felt itself other than its body?

Until now, I had always accepted what seemed the natural and universal repugnance to absolute dissolution as the strongest argument on the side of immortality;—for why should a man shrink from that which belonged to his nature? But now annihilation seemed the one lovely thing, the one sole only lonely thought in which lay no blackness of burning darkness. Oh, for one eternal unconscious sleep!—the nearest likeness we can cherish of that inconceivable nothingness—ever denied by the very thinking of it—by the vain attempt to realize that whose very existence is the knowing nothing of itself! Could that dagger have insured me such repose, or had there been any draught of Lethe, utter Lethe, whose blessed poison would have assuredly dissipated like a fume this conscious self-tormenting *me*, I should not now be writhing anew, as in the clutches of an old grief, clasping me like a corpse, stung to simulated life by the galvanic battery of recollection. Vivid as it seems—all I suffer as I write is but a faint phantasm of what I then endured.

I learned, therefore, that to some minds the argument for immortality drawn from the apparently universal shrinking from annihilation must be ineffectual, seeing they themselves do not shrink from it. Convince a man that there is no God—or, for I doubt if that be altogether possible—make it, I will say, impossible for him to hope in God—and it cannot be that annihilation should seem an evil. If there is no God, annihilation is the one thing to be longed for, with all that might of longing which is the mainspring of human action. In a word, it is not immortality the human heart cries out after, but that immortal eternal thought whose life is its life, whose wisdom is its wisdom, whose ways and whose thoughts shall—must one day—become its ways and its thoughts. Dissociate immortality from the living Immortality, and it is not a thing to be desired—not a thing that can on those terms, or even on the fancy of those terms, be desired.

But such thoughts as these were far from me then. I lived because I despaired of death. I ate by a sort of blind animal instinct, and so

lived. The time had been when I would despise myself for being able to eat in the midst of emotion; but now I cared so little for the emotion even, that eating or not eating had nothing to do with the matter. I ate because meat was set before me; I slept because sleep came upon me. It was a horrible time. My life seemed only a vermiculate one, a crawling about of half-thoughts-half-feelings through the corpse of a decaying existence. The heart of being was withdrawn from me, and my life was but the vacant pericardium in which it had once throbbed out and sucked in the red fountains of life and gladness.

I would not be thought to have fallen to this all but bottomless depth only because I had lost Mary. Still less was it because of the fact that in her, around whom had gathered all the devotion with which the man in me could regard woman, I had lost all womankind. It was *the loss* of Mary, as I then judged it, not, I repeat, the fact that *I* had lost her. It was that she had lost herself. Thence it was, I say, that I lost my hope in God. For, if there were a

God, how could he let purity be clasped in the arms of defilement? how could he marry my Athanasia—not to a corpse, but to a Plague? Here was the man who had done more to ruin her brother than any but her father, and God had given her to *him!* *I* had had—with the commonest of men—some notion of womanly purity—how was it that hers had not instinctively shuddered and shrunk? how was it that the life of it had not taken refuge with death to shun bare contact with the coarse impurity of such a nature as that of Geoffrey Brotherton? My dreams had been dreams indeed! Was my Athanasia dead, or had she never been? In my thought, she had "said to Corruption, Thou art my father; to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister." Who should henceforth say of any woman that she was impure? She *might* love him—true; but what was she then who was able to love such a man? It was this that stormed the citadel of my hope, and drove me from even thinking of a God.

Gladly would I now have welcomed any bodily suffering that could hide me from my-

self; but no illness came. I was a living pain, a conscious ill-being. In a thousand forms those questions would ever recur, but without hope of answer. When I fell asleep from exhaustion, hideous visions of her with Geoffrey would start me up with a great cry, sometimes with a curse on my lips. Nor were they the most horrible of those dreams in which she would help him to mock me. Once, and only once, I found myself dreaming the dream of *that* night, and I knew that I had dreamed it before. Through palace and chapel and charnel-house, I followed her, ever with a dim sense of awful result; and when at the last she lifted the shining veil, instead of the face of Athanasia, the bare teeth of a skull grinned at me from under a spotted shroud, through which the sunlight shone from behind, revealing all its horrors. I was not mad—my reason had not given way: *how* remains a marvel.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE DAWN.

ALL places were alike to me now—for the universe was but one dreary chasm whence I could not escape. One evening I sat by the open window of my chamber, which looked towards those trees and that fatal Moldwarp Hall. My suffering had now grown dull by its own excess, and I had moments of restless vacuity, the nearest approach to peace I had yet experienced. It was a fair evening of early summer—but I was utterly careless of nature as of all beyond it. The sky was nothing to me—and the earth was all unlovely. There I sat, heavy, but free from torture; a kind of quiet had stolen over me. I was roused by the tiniest breath of wind on my cheek, as if the

passing wing of some butterfly had fanned me; and on that faintest motion came a scent as from long-forgotten fields, a scent like as of sweet-peas or wild roses, but of neither: flowers were none nearer me than the gardens of the Hall. I started with a cry. It was the scent of the garments of my Athanasia, as I had dreamed it in my dream! Whence that wind had borne it, who could tell? but in the husk that had overgrown my being it had found a cranny, and through that cranny, with the scent, Nature entered. I looked up to the blue sky, wept, and for the first time fell on my knees. "O God!" I cried, and that was all. But what are the prayers of the whole universe more than expansions of that one cry? It is not what God can give us, but God that we want. Call the whole thing fancy if you will; it was at least no fancy that the next feeling of which I was conscious was compassion: from that moment I began to search heaven and earth and the soul of man and woman for excuses wherewith to clothe the idea of Mary Osborne. For weeks and weeks I pondered, and by degrees

the following conclusions wrought themselves out in my brain:—

That she had never seen life as a whole; that her religious theories had ever been eating away and absorbing her life, so preventing her religion from interpenetrating and glorifying it; that in regard to certain facts and consequences she had been left to an ignorance which her innocence rendered profound; that, attracted by the worldly splendour of the offer, her father and mother had urged her compliance, and, broken in spirit by the fate of Charley, and having always been taught that self-denial was in itself a virtue, she had taken the worldly desires ~~of~~ of her parents for the will of God, and blindly yielded; that Brotherton was capable, for his ends, of representing himself as possessed of religion enough to satisfy the scruples of her parents, and, such being satisfied, she had resisted her own as evil things.

Whether his hatred of me had had any share in his desire to possess her, I hardly thought of inquiring.

Of course I did not for a single moment be-

lieve that Mary had had the slightest notion of the bitterness, the torture, the temptation of Satan it would be to me. Doubtless the feeling of her father concerning the death of Charley had seemed to hollow an impassable gulf between us. Worn and weak, and not knowing what she did, my dearest friend had yielded herself to the embrace of my deadliest foe. If he was such as I had too good reason for believing him, she was far more to be pitied than I. Lonely she must be—lonely as I—for who was there to understand and love her? Bitterly too by this time she must have suffered, for the dove can never be at peace in the bosom of the vulture, or cease to hate the carrion of which he must ever carry about with him at least the disgusting memorials. Alas! I too had been her enemy, and had cried out against her; but now I would love her more and better than ever! Oh! if I knew but something I could do for her, some service which on the bended knees of my spirit I might offer her! I clomb the heights of my grief, and looked around, but alas! I was such a poor creature! A dabbler in the ways of

the world, a writer of tales which even those who cared to read them counted fantastic and Utopian, who was I to weave a single silken thread into the web of her life? How could I bear her one poorest service? Never in this world could I approach her near enough to touch yet once again the hem of her garment. All I could do was to love her. No—I could and did suffer for her. Alas! that suffering was only for myself, and could do nothing for her! It was indeed some consolation to me that my misery came from her hand; but if she knew it, it would but add to her pain. In my heart I could only pray her pardon for my wicked and selfish thoughts concerning her, and vow again and ever to regard her as my Athanasia.—But yes! there was one thing I *could* do for her: I would be a true man for her sake; she should have some satisfaction in me; I would once more arise and go to my Father.

The instant the thought arose in my mind, I fell down before the possible God in an agony of weeping. All complaint of my own doom had vanished, now that I began to do her the

justice of love. Why should *I* be blessed—here and now at least—according to my notions of blessedness? Let the great heart of the universe do with me as it pleased! Let the Supreme take his own time to justify himself to the heart that sought to love him! I gave up myself, was willing to suffer, to be a living pain, so long as he pleased; and the moment I yielded half the pain was gone; I gave my Athanasia yet again to God, and all *might* yet, in some high, far-off, better-world-way, be well. I could wait and endure. If only God was, and was God, then it was, or would be, well with Mary —well with me!

But, as I still sat, a flow of sweet sad repentant thought passing gently through my bosom, all at once the self to which, unable to confide it to the care of its own very life, the God conscious of himself and in himself conscious of it, I had been for months offering the sacrifices of despair and indignation, arose in spectral hideousness before me. I saw that I, a child of the infinite, had been worshipping the finite—and therein dragging down the

infinite towards the fate of the finite. I do not mean that in Mary Osborne I had been worshipping the finite. It was the eternal, the lovely, the true that in her I had been worshipping: in myself I had been worshipping the mean, the selfish, the finite, the god of spiritual greed. Only in himself *can* a man find the finite to worship; only in turning back upon himself does he create the finite for and by his worship. All the works of God are everlasting; the only perishable are some of the works of man. All love is a worship of the infinite: what is called a man's love for himself, is not love; it is but a phantastic resemblance of love; it is a creating of the finite, a creation of death. A man *cannot* love himself. If all love be not creation—as I think it is—it is at least the only thing in harmony with creation, and the love of oneself is its absolute opposite. I sickened at the sight of myself: how should I ever get rid of the demon? The same instant I saw the one escape: I must offer it back to its source—commit it to him who had made it. I must live no more from it, but from the source of it;

seek to know nothing more of it than he gave me to know by his presence therein. Thus might I become one with the Eternal in such an absorption as Buddha had never dreamed; thus might I draw life ever fresh from its fountain. And in that fountain alone would I contemplate its reflex. What flashes of self-consciousness might cross me, should be God's gift, not of my seeking, and offered again to him in ever new self-sacrifice. Alas! alas! this I saw then, and this I yet see; but oh, how far am I still from that divine annihilation! The only comfort is, God is, and I am his, else I should not be at all.

I saw too that thus God also lives—in his higher way. I saw, shadowed out in the absolute devotion of Jesus to men, that the very life of God by which we live is an everlasting eternal giving of himself away. He asserts himself, only, solely, altogether, in an infinite sacrifice of devotion. So must we live; the child must be as the father; live he cannot on any other plan, struggle as he may. The father requires of him nothing that he is not or does

not himself, who is the one prime unconditioned sacrificer and sacrifice. I threw myself on the ground, and offered back my poor wretched self to its owner, to be taken and kept, purified and made divine.

The same moment a sense of reviving health began to possess me. With many fluctuations, it has possessed me, has grown, and is now, if not a persistent cheerfulness, yet an unyielding hope. The world bloomed again around me. The sunrise again grew gloriously dear; and the sadness of the moon was lighted from a higher sun than that which returns with the morning.

My relation to Mary resolved and re-formed itself in my mind into something I can explain only by the following—call it dream: it was not a dream; call it vision: it was not a vision; and yet I will tell it as if it were either, being far truer than either.

I lay like a child on one of God's arms. I could not see his face, and the arm that held me was a great cloudy arm. I knew that on his other arm lay Mary. But between us were

forests and plains, mountains and great seas; and, unspeakably worse than all, a gulf with which words had nothing to do, a gulf of pure separation, of impassable nothingness, across which no device, I say not of human skill, but of human imagination, could cast a single connecting cord. There lay Mary, and here lay I —both in God's arms—utterly parted. As in a swoon I lay, through which suddenly came the words: "What God hath joined, man cannot sunder." I lay thinking what they could mean. All at once I thought I knew. Straightway I rose on the cloudy arm, looked down on a measureless darkness beneath me, and up on a great, dreary, world-filled eternity above me, and crept along the arm towards the bosom of God.

In telling my—neither vision nor dream nor ecstasy, I cannot help it that the forms grow so much plainer and more definite in the words than they were in the revelation. Words always give either too much or too little shape: when you want to be definite, you find your words clumsy and blunt; when you want them for a

vague shadowy image, you straightway find them give a sharp and impertinent outline, refusing to lend themselves to your undefined though vivid thought. Forms themselves are hard enough to manage, but words are unmanageable. I must therefore trust to the heart of my reader.

I crept into the bosom of God, and along a great cloudy peace, which I could not understand, for it did not yet enter into me. At length I came to the heart of God, and through that my journey lay. The moment I entered it, the great peace appeared to enter mine, and I began to understand it. Something melted in my heart, and for a moment I thought I was dying, but I found I was being born again. My heart was empty of its old selfishness, and I loved Mary tenfold—nor longer in the least for my own sake, but all for her loveliness. The same moment I knew that the heart of God was a bridge, along which I was crossing the unspeakable eternal gulf that divided Mary and me. At length, somehow, I know not how, somewhere, I know not where, I was where

she was. She knew nothing of my presence, turned neither face nor eye to meet me, stretched out no hand to give me the welcome of even a friend, and yet I not only knew, but felt that she was mine. I wanted nothing from her; desired the presence of her loveliness only that I might know it; hung about her life as a butterfly over the flower he loves; was satisfied that she could *be*. I had left my self behind in the heart of God, and now I was a pure essence, fit to rejoice in the essential. But alas! my whole being was not yet subject to its best. I began to long to be able to do something for her besides—I foolishly said *beyond* loving her. Back rushed my old self in the selfish thought: Some day—will she not know—and at least ——? That moment the vision vanished. I was tossed—ah! let me hope, only to the other arm of God—but I lay in torture yet again. For a man may see visions manifold, and believe them all; and yet his faith shall not save him; something more is needed—he must have that presence of God in his soul, of which the Son of Man spoke, saying: "If a man love me,

he will keep my words : and my father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." God in him, he will be able to love for very love's sake; God not in him, his best love will die into selfishness.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MY GREAT-GRANDMOTHER.

THE morning then which had thus dawned upon me, was often over-clouded heavily. Yet it was the morning and not the night; and one of the strongest proofs that it was the morning lay in this, that again I could think in verse.

One day, after an hour or two of bitterness, I wrote the following. A man's trouble must have receded from him a little for the moment, if he descries any shape in it, so as to be able to give it form in words. I set it down with no hope of better than the vaguest sympathy. There came no music with this one.

If it be that a man and a woman
  Are made for no mutual grief;
That each gives the pain to some other,
  And neither can give the relief;

If thus the chain of the world
  Is tied round the holy feet,
I scorn to shrink from facing
  What my brothers and sisters meet.

But I cry when the wolf is tearing
  At the core of my heart as now:
When I was the man to be tortured,
  Why should the woman be *thou?*

I am not so ready to sink from the lofty into the abject now. If at times I yet feel that the whole creation is groaning and travailing, I know what it is for—its redemption from the dominion of its own death into that sole liberty which comes only of being filled and eternally possessed by God himself, its source and its life.

And now I found also that my heart began to be moved with a compassion towards my fellows such as I had never before experienced. I shall best convey what I mean by transcribing another little poem I wrote about the same time.

Once I sat on a crimson throne,
  And I held the world in fee;
Below me I heard my brothers moan,
  And I bent me down to see;—

Lovingly bent and looked on them,
  But *I* had no inward pain;
I sat in the heart of my ruby gem,
  Like a rainbow without the rain.

My throne is vanished; helpless I lie
  At the foot of its broken stair;
And the sorrows of all humanity
  Through my heart make a thoroughfare.

Let such things rest for awhile: I have now to relate another incident—strange enough, but by no means solitary in the records of human experience. My reader will probably think that of dreams and visions there has already been more than enough; but perhaps she will kindly remember that at this time I had no outer life at all. Whatever bore to me the look of existence was within me. All my days the tendency had been to an undue predominance of thought over action, and now that the springs of action were for a time dried up, what wonder was it if thought, lording it alone, should assume a

reality beyond its right? Hence the life of the day was prolonged into the night; nor was there other than a small difference in their conditions, beyond the fact that the contrast of outer things was removed in sleep; whence the shapes which the waking thought had assumed had space and opportunity, as it were, to thicken before the mental eye until they became dreams and visions.

But concerning what I am about to relate I shall offer no theory. Such mere operation of my own thoughts may be sufficient to account for it: I would only ask—does anyone know what the *mere* operation of his own thoughts signifies? I cannot isolate myself, especially in those moments when the individual will is less awake, from the ocean of life and thought which not only surrounds me, but on which I am in a sense one of the floating bubbles.

I was asleep, but I thought I lay awake in bed—in the room where I still slept—that which had been my grannie's.—It was dark midnight, and the wind was howling about the gable and in the chimneys. The door opened, and some

one entered. By the lamp she carried I knew my great-grandmother,—just as she looked in life, only that now she walked upright and with ease. That I was dreaming is plain from the fact that I felt no surprise at seeing her.

"Wilfrid, come with me," she said, approaching the bedside. "Rise."

I obeyed like a child.

"Put your cloak on," she continued. "It is a stormy midnight, but we have not so far to go as you may think."

"I think nothing, grannie," I said. "I do not know where you want to take me."

"Come and see then, my son. You must at last learn what has been kept from you far too long."

As she spoke she led the way down the stair, through the kitchen, and out into the dark night. I remember the wind blowing my cloak about, but I remember nothing more until I found myself in the winding hazel-walled lane, leading to Umberden Church. My grannie was leading me by one withered hand; in the other she held the lamp, over the flame of which the

wind had no power. She led me into the churchyard, took the key from under the tombstone, unlocked the door of the church, put the lamp into my hand, pushed me gently in, and shut the door behind me. I walked to the vestry, and set the lamp on the desk, with a vague feeling that I had been there before, and that I had now to do something at this desk. Above it I caught sight of the row of vellum-bound books, and remembered that one of them contained something of importance to me. I took it down. The moment I opened it I remembered with distinctness the fatal discrepancy in the entry of my grannie's marriage. I found the place: to my astonishment the date of the year was now the same as that on the preceding page—1747. That instant I awoke in the first gush of the sunrise.

I could not help feeling even a little excited by my dream, and the impression of it grew upon me: I wanted to see the book again. I could not rest. Something seemed constantly urging me to go and look at it. Half to get the thing out of my head, I sent Styles to fetch

Lilith, and for the first time since the final assurance of my loss, mounted her. I rode for Umberden Church.

It was long after noon before I had made up my mind, and when, having tied Lilith to the gate, I entered the church, one red ray from the setting sun was nestling in the very roof. Knowing what I should find, yet wishing to see it again, I walked across to the vestry, feeling rather uncomfortable at the thought of prying thus alone into the parish register.

I could almost have persuaded myself that I was dreaming still; and in looking back, I can hardly in my mind separate the dreaming from the waking visit.

Of course I found just what I had expected —1748, not 1747—at the top of the page, and was about to replace the register, when the thought occurred to me that, if the dream had been potent enough to bring me hither, it might yet mean something. I lifted the cover again. There the entry stood undeniably plain. This time, however, I noted two other little facts concerning it.

I will just remind my reader that the entry was crushed in between the date of the year and the next entry—plainly enough to the eye; and that there was no attestation to the entries of 1747. The first additional fact—and clearly an important one—was that, in the summing up of 1748, before the signature, which stood near the bottom of the cover, a figure had been altered. Originally it stood: "In all six couple," but the six had been altered to a seven—corresponding with the actual number. This appeared proof positive that the first entry on the cover was a forged insertion. And how clumsily it had been managed!

"What could my grannie be about?" I said to myself.

It never occurred to me then that it might have been intended to *look like* a forgery.

Still I kept staring at it, as if by very force of staring I could find out something. There was not the slightest sign of erasure or alteration beyond the instance I have mentioned. Yet—and here was my second note—when I compared the whole of the writing on the cover

with the writing on the preceding page, though it seemed the same hand, it seemed to have got stiffer and shakier, as if the writer had grown old between. Finding nothing very suggestive in this, however, I fell into a dreamy mood, watching the red light, as it faded, up in the old, dark, distorted roof of the desolate church—with my hand lying on the book.

I have always had a bad habit of pulling and scratching at any knot or roughness in the paper of the book I happen to be reading; and now, almost unconsciously, with my forefinger I was pulling at an edge of parchment which projected from the joint of the cover. When I came to myself and proceeded to close the book, I found it would not shut properly because of a piece which I had curled up. Seeking to restore it to its former position, I fancied I saw a line or edge running all down the joint, and looking closer, saw that these last entries, in place of being upon a leaf of the book pasted to the cover in order to strengthen the binding, as I had supposed, were indeed upon a leaf which was pasted to the cover, but one which

was not otherwise connected with the volume.

I now began to feel a more lively interest in the behaviour of my dream-grannie. Here might lie something to explain the hitherto inexplicable. I proceeded to pull the leaf gently away. It was of parchment, much thinner than the others, which were of vellum. I had withdrawn only a small portion when I saw there was writing under it. My heart began to beat faster. But I would not be rash. My old experience with parchment in the mending of my uncle's books came to my aid. If I pulled at the dry skin as I had been doing, I might not only damage it, but destroy the writing under it. I could do nothing without water, and I did not know where to find any. It would be better to ride to the village of Gastford, somewhere about two miles off, put up there, and arrange for future proceedings.

I did not know the way, and for a long time could see no one to ask. The consequence was that I made a wide round, and it was nearly dark before I reached the village. I thought it

better for the present to feed Lilith, and then make the best of my way home.

The next evening—I felt so like a thief that I sought the thievish security of the night—having provided myself with what was necessary, and borrowed a horse for Styles, I set out again.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE PARISH REGISTER.

THE sky clouded as we went; it grew very dark, and the wind began to blow. It threatened a storm. I told Styles a little of what I was about—just enough to impress on him the necessity for prudence. The wind increased, and by the time we gained the copse, it was roaring, and the slender hazels bending like a field of corn.

"You will have enough to do with two horses," I said.

"I don't mind it, sir," Styles answered. "A word from me will quiet Miss Lilith; and for the other, I've known him pretty well for two years past."

I left them tolerably sheltered in the winding lane, and betook myself alone to the church. Cautiously I opened the door, and felt my way from pew to pew, for it was quite dark. I could just distinguish the windows from the walls, and nothing more. As soon as I reached the vestry, I struck a light, got down the volume, and proceeded to moisten the parchment with a wet sponge. For some time the water made little impression on the old parchment, of which but one side could be exposed to its influence, and I began to fear I should be much longer in gaining my end than I had expected. The wind roared and howled about the trembling church, which seemed too weak with age to resist such an onslaught; but when at length the skin began to grow soft and yield to my gentle efforts at removal, I became far too much absorbed in the simple operation, which had to be performed with all the gentleness and nicety of a surgical one, to heed the uproar about me. Slowly the glutinous adhesion gave way, and slowly the writing revealed itself. In mingled hope and doubt I restrained

my curiosity; and as one teases oneself sometimes by dallying with a letter of the greatest interest, not until I had folded down the parchment clear of what was manifestly an entry, did I bring my candle close to it, and set myself to read it. Then, indeed, I found I had reason to regard with respect the dream which had brought me thither.

Right under the 1748 of the parchment, stood on the vellum cover 1747. Then followed the usual blank, and then came an entry corresponding word for word with the other entry of my great-grandfather and mother's marriage. In all probability Moldwarp Hall was mine! Little as it could do for me now, I confess to a keen pang of pleasure at the thought.

Meantime, I followed out my investigation, and gradually stripped the parchment off the vellum to within a couple of inches of the bottom of the cover. The result of knowledge was as follows:—

Next to the entry of the now hardly hypothetical marriage of my ancestors, stood the summing up of the marriages of 1747, with the

signature of the rector. I paused, and, turning back, counted them. Including that in which alone I was interested, I found the number given correct. Next came by itself the figures 1748, and then a few more entries, followed by the usual summing up and signature of the rector. From this I turned to the leaf of parchment: there was a difference: upon the latter the sum was six, altered to seven; on the former it was five. This of course suggested further search: I soon found where the difference indicated lay.

As the entry of *the* marriage was, on the forged leaf, shifted up close to the forged 1748, and as the summing and signature had to be omitted, because they belonged to the end of 1747, a blank would have been left, and the writing below would have shone through and attracted attention, revealing the forgery of the whole, instead of that of the part only which was intended to look a forgery. To prevent this, an altogether fictitious entry had been made—over the summing and signature. This, with the genuine entries faithfully copied, made

of the five, six, which the forger had written and then blotted into a seven, intending to expose the entry of my ancestors' marriage as a forgery, while the rest of the year's register should look genuine. It took me some little trouble to clear it all up to my own mind, but by degrees everything settled into its place, assuming an intelligible shape in virtue of its position.

With my many speculations as to why the mechanism of the forgery had assumed this shape, I need not trouble my reader. Suffice it to say that on more than one supposition, I can account for it satisfactorily to myself. One other remark only will I make concerning it: I have no doubt it was an old forgery. One after another those immediately concerned in it had died, and there the falsehood lurked—in latent power—inoperative until my second visit to Umberden Church. But what differences might there not have been had it not started into activity for the brief space betwixt then and my sorrow?

I left the parchment still attached to the

cover at the bottom, and, laying a sheet of paper between the formerly adhering surfaces, lest they should again adhere, closed and replaced the volume. Then, looking at my watch, I found that, instead of an hour as I had supposed, I had been in the church three hours. It was nearly eleven o'clock, too late for anything further that night.

When I came out, the sky was clear and the stars were shining. The storm had blown over. Much rain had fallen. But when the wind ceased or the rain began, I had no recollection: the storm had vanished altogether from my consciousness. I found Styles where I had left him, smoking his pipe and leaning against Lilith, who—I cannot call her *which*—was feeding on the fine grass of the lane. The horse he had picketed near. We mounted and rode home.

The next thing was to see the rector of Umberden. He lived in his other parish, and thither I rode the following day to call upon him. I found him an old gentleman, of the squire-type of rector. As soon as he heard my

name, he seemed to know who I was, and at once showed himself hospitable.

I told him that I came to him as I might, were I a Catholic, to a father-confessor. This startled him a little.

"Don't tell me anything I ought not to keep secret," he said; and it gave me confidence in him at once.

"I will not," I returned. "The secret is purely my own. Whatever crime there is in it, was past punishment long before I was born; and it was committed against, not by my family. But it is rather a long story, and I hope I shall not be tedious."

He assured me of his perfect leisure.

I told him everything, from my earliest memory, which bore on the discovery I had at length made. He soon showed signs of interest; and when I had ended the tale with the facts of the preceding night, he silently rose and walked about the room. After a few moments, he said:

"And what do you mean to do, Mr. Cumbermede?"

"Nothing," I answered, "so long as Sir Giles is alive. He was kind to me when I was a boy."

He came up behind me where I was seated, and laid his hand gently on my head; then, without a word, resumed his walk.

"And if you survive him, what then?"

"Then I must be guided partly by circumstances," I said.

"And what do you want of me?"

"I want you to go with me to the church, and see the book, that, in case of anything happening to it, you may be a witness concerning its previous contents."

"I am too old to be the only witness," he said. "You ought to have several of your own age."

"I want as few to know the secret as may be," I answered.

"You should have your lawyer one of them."

"He would never leave me alone about it," I replied; "and positively I shall take no measures at present. Some day I hope to

punish him for deserting me as he did."

For I had told him how Mr. Coningham had behaved.

"Revenge, Mr. Cumbermede?"

"Not a serious one. All the punishment I hope to give him is but to show him the fact of the case, and leave him to feel as he may about it."

"There can't be much harm in that."

He reflected a few moments, and then said:

"I will tell you what will be best. We shall go and see the book together. I will make an extract of both entries, and give a description of the state of the volume, with an account of how the second entry—or more properly the first—came to be discovered. This I shall sign in the presence of two witnesses, who need know nothing of the contents of the paper. Of that you shall yourself take charge."

We went together to the church. The old man, after making a good many objections, was at length satisfied, and made notes for his paper. He started the question whether it would not be better to secure that volume at least under

lock and key. For this I thought there was no occasion—that in fact it was safer where it was, and more certain of being forthcoming when wanted. I did suggest that the key of the church might be deposited in a place of safety; but he answered that it had been kept there ever since he came to the living forty years ago, and for how long before that he could not tell; and so a change would attract attention, and possibly make some talk in the parish, which had better be avoided.

Before the end of the week, he had his document ready. He signed it in my presence, and in that of two of his parishioners, who as witnesses appended their names and abodes. I have it now in my possession. I shall enclose it, with my great-grandfather and mother's letters—and something besides—in the packet containing this history.

That same week Sir Giles Brotherton died.

## CHAPTER XX.

### A FOOLISH TRIUMPH.

I SHOULD have now laid claim to my property, but for Mary. To turn Sir Geoffrey with his mother and sister out of it, would have caused me little compunction, for they would still be rich enough; I confess indeed it would have given me satisfaction. Nor could I say what real hurt of any kind it would occasion to Mary; and if I were writing for the public, instead of my one reader, I know how foolishly incredible it must appear that for her sake I should forego such claims. She would, however, I trust, have been able to believe it without the proofs which I intend to give her. The fact was simply this: I could not, even for my

own sake, bear the thought of taking, in any manner or degree, a position if but apparently antagonistic to her. My enemy was her husband: he should reap the advantage of being her husband; for her sake he should for the present retain what was mine. So long as there should be no reason to fear his adopting a different policy from his father's in respect of his tenants, I felt myself at liberty to leave things as they were; for Sir Giles had been a good landlord, and I knew the son was regarded with favour in the county. Were he to turn out unjust or oppressive, however, then duty on my part would come in. But I must also remind my reader that I had no love for affairs; that I had an income perfectly sufficient for my wants; that, both from my habits of thought and from my sufferings, my regard was upon life itself—was indeed so far from being confined to this chrysalid beginning thereof, that I had lost all interest in this world save as the porch to the house of life. And, should I ever meet her again, in any possible future of being, how much rather would I not stand before her

as one who had been even Quixotic for her sake—as one who for a hair's-breadth of her interest had felt the sacrifice of a fortune a merely natural movement of his life! She would then know not merely that I was true to her, but that I had been true in what I professed to believe when I sought her favour. And if it had been a pleasure to me—call it a weakness, and I will not oppose the impeachment;—call it self-pity, and I will confess to that as having a share in it;—but, if it had been a shadowy pleasure to me to fancy I suffered for her sake, my present resolution, while it did not add the weight of a feather to my suffering, did yet give me a similar vague satisfaction.

I must also confess to a certain satisfaction in feeling that I had power over my enemy—power of making him feel my power—power of vindicating my character against him as well, seeing one who could thus abstain from asserting his own rights could hardly have been one to invade the rights of another; but the enjoyment of this consciousness appeared to depend

on my silence. If I broke that, the strength would depart from me; but while I held my peace, I held my foe in an invisible mesh. I half deluded myself into fancying that, while I kept my power over him unexercised, I retained a sort of pledge for his conduct to Mary, of which I was more than doubtful; for a man with such antecedents as his, a man who had been capable of behaving as he had behaved to Charley, was less than likely to be true to his wife: he was less than likely to treat the sister as a lady, who to the brother had been a traitorous seducer.

I have now to confess a fault as well as an imprudence—punished, I believe, in the results.

The behaviour of Mr. Coningham still rankled a little in my bosom. From Geoffrey I had never looked for anything but evil; of Mr. Coningham I had expected differently, and I began to meditate the revenge of holding him up to himself: I would punish him in a manner which, with his confidence in his business faculty, he must feel: I would simply show him how the

precipitation of selfish disappointment had led him astray, and frustrated his designs. For if he had given even a decent attention to the matter, he would have found in the forgery itself hints sufficient to suggest the desirableness of further investigation.

I had not, however, concluded upon anything, when one day I accidentally met him, and we had a little talk about business, for he continued to look after the rent of my field. He informed me that Sir Geoffrey Brotherton had been doing all he could to get even temporary possession of the park, as we called it; and, although I said nothing of it to Mr. Coningham, my suspicion is that, had he succeeded, he would, at the risk of a law-suit, in which he would certainly have been cast, have ploughed it up. He told me, also, that Clara was in poor health; she who had looked as if no blight could ever touch her had broken down utterly. The shadow of her sorrow was plain enough on the face of her father, and his confident manner had a little yielded, although he was the old man still. His father had died a little before Sir

Giles. The new baronet had not offered him the succession.

I asked him to go with me yet once more to Umberden Church—for I wanted to show him something he had overlooked in the register—not, I said, that it would be of the slightest furtherance to his former hopes. He agreed at once, already a little ashamed, perhaps, of the way in which he had abandoned me. Before we parted we made an appointment to meet at the church.

We went at once to the vestry. I took down the volume, and laid it before him. He opened it, with a curious look at me first. But the moment he lifted the cover, its condition at once attracted and as instantly riveted his attention. He gave me one glance more, in which questions and remarks and exclamations numberless lay in embryo; then turning to the book, was presently absorbed, first in reading the genuine entry, next in comparing it with the forged one.

"Right, after all!" he exclaimed at length.

"In what?" I asked. "In dropping me with-

out a word, as if I had been an impostor? In forgetting that you yourself had raised in me the hopes whose discomfiture you took as a personal injury?"

"My dear sir!" he stammered in an expostulatory tone, "you must make allowance. It was a tremendous disappointment to me."

"I cannot say I felt it quite so much myself, but at least you owed me an apology for having misled me."

"I had *not* misled you," he retorted angrily, pointing to the register.—"There!"

"You left *me* to find that out, though. *You* took no further pains in the matter."

"How *did* you find it out?" he asked, clutching at a change in the tone of the conversation.

I said nothing of my dream, but I told him everything else concerning the discovery. When I had finished—

"It's all plain sailing now," he cried. "There is not an obstacle in the way. I will set the thing in motion the instant I get home.—It will be a victory worth achieving," he added, rubbing his hands.

"Mr. Coningham, I have not the slightest intention of moving in the matter," I said.

His face fell.

"You do not mean—when you hold them in your very hands—to throw away every advantage of birth and fortune, and be a nobody in the world?"

"Infinite advantages of the kind you mean, Mr. Coningham, could make me not one whit more than I am; they *might* make me less."

"Come, come," he expostulated; "you must not allow disappointment to upset your judgment of things."

"My judgment of things lies deeper than any disappointment I have yet had," I replied. "My uncle's teaching has at last begun to bear fruit in me."

"Your uncle was a fool!" he exclaimed.

"But for my uncle's sake, I would knock you down for daring to couple such a word with *him*."

He turned on me with a sneer. His eyes had receded in his head, and in his rage he grinned. The old ape-face, which had lurked in my

memory ever since the time I first saw him, came out so plainly that I started: the child had read his face aright! the following judgment of the man had been wrong! the child's fear had not imprinted a false eidolon upon the growing brain.

"What right had you," he said, "to bring me all this way for such tomfoolery?"

"I told you it would not further your wishes. —But who brought me here for nothing first?" I added, most foolishly.

"I was myself deceived. I did not intend to deceive you."

"I know that. God forbid I should be unjust to you! But you have proved to me that your friendship was all a pretence; that your private ends were all your object. When you discovered that I could not serve those, you dropped me like a bit of glass you had taken for a diamond. Have you any right to grumble if I give you the discipline of a passing shame?"

"Mr. Cumbermede," he said, through his teeth, "you will repent this."

I gave him no answer, and he left the church

in haste. Having replaced the register, I was following at my leisure, when I heard sounds that made me hurry to the door. Lilith was plunging and rearing and pulling at the bridle which I had thrown over one of the spiked bars of the gate. Another moment and she must have broken loose, or dragged the gate upon her—more likely the latter, for the bridle was a new one with broad reins—when some frightful injury would in all probability have been the consequence to herself. But a word from me quieted her, and she stood till I came up. Every inch of her was trembling. I suspected at once, and in a moment discovered plainly that Mr. Coningham had struck her with his whip: there was a big weal on the fine skin of her hip and across her croup. She shrunk like a hurt child when my hand approached the injured part, but moved neither hoof nor head.

Having patted and petted and consoled her a little, I mounted and rode after Mr. Coningham. Nor was it difficult to overtake him, for he was going a footpace. He was stooping in

his saddle, and when I drew near, I saw that he was looking very pale. I did not, however, suspect that he was in pain.

"It was a cowardly thing to strike the poor dumb animal," I cried.

"You would have struck her yourself," he answered with a curse, "if she had broken your leg."

I rode nearer. I knew well enough that she would not have kicked him if he had not struck her first; and I could see that his leg was not broken; but evidently he was in great suffering.

"I am very sorry," I said. "Can I help you?"

"Go to the devil!" he groaned.

I am ashamed to say the answer made me so angry that I spoke the truth.

"Don't suppose you deceive me," I said. "I know well enough my mare did *not* kick you before you struck her. Then she lashed out, of course."

I waited for no reply, but turned and rode back to the church, the door of which, in my

haste, I had left open. I locked it, replaced the key, and then rode quietly home.

But as I went, I began to feel that I had done wrong. No doubt, Mr. Coningham deserved it, but the law was not in my hands. No man has a right to *punish* another. Vengeance belongs to a higher region, and the vengeance of God is a very different thing from the vengeance of man. However it may be softened with the name of retribution, revenge runs into all our notions of justice; and until we love purely, so it must ever be.

All I had gained was self-rebuke, and another enemy. Having reached home, I read the Manual of Epictetus right through before I laid it down, and, if it did not teach me to love my enemies, it taught me at least to be ashamed of myself. Then I wrote to Mr. Coningham, saying I was sorry I had spoken to him as I did, and begging him to let by-gones be by-gones; assuring him that, if ever I moved in the matter of our difference, he should be the first to whom I applied for assistance.

He returned me no answer.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A COLLISION.

AND now came a dreary time of reaction. There seemed nothing left for me to do, and I felt listless and weary. Something kept urging me to get away and hide myself, and I soon made up my mind to yield to the impulse and go abroad. My intention was to avoid cities, and, wandering from village to village, lay my soul bare to the healing influences of nature. As to any healing in the power of Time, I despised the old bald-pate as a quack who performed his seeming cures at the expense of the whole body. The better cures attributed to him are not his at all, but produced by the operative causes whose servant he is. A thousand holy balms require

his services for their full action, but they, and not he, are the saving powers. Along with Time I ranked, and with absolute hatred shrunk from—all those means which offered to cure me by making me forget. From a child I had a horror of forgetting; it always seemed to me like a loss of being, like a hollow scooped out of my very existence—almost like the loss of identity. At times I even shrunk from going to sleep, so much did it seem like yielding to an absolute death—a death so deep that the visible death is but a picture or type of it. If I could have been sure of dreaming, it would have been different, but in the uncertainty it seemed like consenting to nothingness. That one who thus felt should ever have been tempted to suicide, will reveal how painful if not valueless his thoughts and feelings—his conscious life—must have grown to him; and that the only thing which withheld him from it should be the fear that no death, but a more intense life might be the result, will reveal it yet more clearly. That in that sleep I might at least dream—there was the rub.

All such relief, in a word, as might come of a lowering of my life, either physically, morally, or spiritually, I hated, detested, despised. The man who finds solace for a wounded heart in self-indulgence may indeed be *capable* of angelic virtues, but in the meantime his conduct is that of the devils who went into the swine rather than be bodiless. The man who can thus be consoled for the loss of a woman could never have been worthy of her, possibly would not have remained true to her beyond the first delights of possession. The relief to which I could open my door must be such alone as would operate through the enlarging and elevating of what I recognised as *myself.* Whatever would make me greater, so that my torture, intensified, it might well be, should yet have room to dash itself hither and thither without injuring the walls of my being, would be welcome. If I might become so great that, my grief yet stinging me to agony, the infinite *I* of me should remain pure and calm, God-loving and man-cherishing, then I should be saved. God might be able to do more for me—

I could not tell: I looked for no more. I would myself be such as to inclose my pain in a mighty sphere of out-spacing life, in relation to which even such sorrow as mine should be but a little thing. Such deliverance alone, I say, could I consent with myself to accept, and such alone, I believed, would God offer me—for such alone seemed worthy of him, and such alone seemed not unworthy of me.

The help that Nature could give me, I judged to be of this ennobling kind. For either nature was nature in virtue of having been born (*nata*) of God, or she was but a phantasm of my own brain—against which supposition the nature in me protested with the agony of a tortured man. To nature, then, I would go. Like the hurt child who folds himself in the skirt of his mother's velvet garment, I would fold myself in the robe of Deity.

But to give honour and gratitude where both are due, I must here confess obligation with a willing and thankful heart. The *Excursion* of Wordsworth was published ere I was born, but only since I left college had I made acquaint-

ance with it: so long does it take for the light of a new star to reach a distant world! To this book I owe so much that to me it would alone justify the conviction that Wordsworth will never be forgotten. That he is no longer the fashion, militates nothing against his reputation. We, the old ones, hold fast by him for no sentimental reminiscence of the fashion of our youth, but simply because his humanity has come into contact with ours. The men of the new generation have their new loves and worships: it remains to be seen to whom the worthy amongst them will turn long ere the frosts of age begin to gather and the winds of the human autumn to blow. Wordsworth will recede through the gliding ages until, with the greater Chaucer, and the greater Shakspere, and the greater Milton, he is yet a star in the constellated crown of England.

Before I was able to leave home, however, a new event occurred.

I received an anonymous letter, in a handwriting I did not recognize. Its contents were as follows:—

"SIR,—Treachery is intended you. If you have anything worth watching, *watch* it."

For one moment—so few were the places in which through my possessions I was vulnerable—I fancied the warning might point to Lilith, but I soon dismissed the idea. I could make no inquiries, for it had been left an hour before my return from a stroll by an unknown messenger. I could think of nothing besides but the register, and if this was what my correspondent aimed at, I had less reason to be anxious concerning it, because of the attested copy, than my informant probably knew. Still its safety was far from being a matter of indifference to me. I resolved to ride over to Umberden Church, and see if it was as I had left it.

The twilight was fast thickening into darkness when I entered the gloomy building. There was light enough, however, to guide my hand to the right volume, and by carrying it to the door, I was able to satisfy myself that it was as I had left it.

Thinking over the matter once more as I

stood, I could not help wishing that the book were out of danger just for the present; but there was hardly a place in the bare church where it was possible to conceal it. At last I thought of one—half groped my way to the pulpit, ascended its creaking stair, lifted the cushion of the seat, and laid the book, which was thin, open in the middle, and flat on its face, under it. I then locked the door, mounted, and rode off.

It was now more than dusk. Lilith was frolicsome, and, rejoicing in the grass under her feet, broke into a quick canter along the noiseless, winding lane. Suddenly there was a great shock, and I lay senseless.

I came to myself under the stinging blows of a whip, only afterwards recognized as such, however. I sprung staggering to my feet, and rushed at the dim form of an assailant, with such a sudden and, I suppose, unexpected assault, that he fell under me. Had he not fallen I should have had little chance with him, for, as I now learned by his voice, it was Sir Geoffrey Brotherton.

"Thief! Swindler! Sneak!" he cried, making a last harmless blow at me as he fell.

All the wild beast in my nature was roused. I had no weapon—not even a whip, for Lilith never needed one. It was well, for what I might have done in the first rush of blood to my reviving brain, I dare hardly imagine. I seized him by the throat with such fury that, though far the stronger, he had no chance as he lay. I kneeled on his chest. He struggled furiously, but could not force my gripe from his throat. I soon perceived that I was strangling him, and tightened my grasp.

His efforts were already growing feebler, when I became aware of a soft touch apparently trying to take hold of my hair. Glancing up without relaxing my hold, I saw the white head of Lilith close to mine. Was it the whiteness—was it the calmness of the creature—I cannot pretend to account for the fact, but the same instant before my mind's eye rose the vision of one standing speechless before his accusers, bearing on his form the marks of ruthless blows. I did not then remember that just before I came

out I had been gazing, as I often gazed, upon an Ecce Homo of Albert Dürer's that hung in my room. Immediately my heart awoke within me. My whole being still trembling with passionate struggle and gratified hate, a rush of human pity swept across it. I took my hand from my enemy's throat, rose, withdrew some paces, and burst into tears. I could have embraced him, but I dared not even minister to him for the insult it would appear. He did not at once rise, and when he did, he stood for a few moments, half-unconscious, I think, staring at me. Coming to himself, he felt for and found his whip—I thought with the intention of attacking me again, but he moved towards his horse, which was quietly eating the grass, now wet with dew. Gathering its bridle from around its leg, he mounted, and rode back the way he had come.

I lingered for a while utterly exhausted. I was trembling in every limb. The moon rose and began to shed her low yellow light over the hazel copse, filling the lane with brightness and shadow. Lilith, seeming in her whiteness

to gather a tenfold share of the light upon herself, was now feeding as gently as if she had known nothing of the strife, and I congratulated myself that the fall had not injured her. But as she took a step forward in her feeding, I discovered to my dismay that she was quite lame. For my own part I was now feeling the ache of numerous and severe bruises. When I took Lilith by the bridle to lead her away, I found that neither of us could manage more than two miles an hour. I was very uneasy about her. There was nothing for it, however, but make the best of our way to Gastford. It was no little satisfaction to think, as we hobbled along, that the accident had happened through no carelessness of mine, beyond that of cantering in the dark, for I was on my own side of the road. Had Geoffrey been on his, narrow as the lane was, we might have passed without injury.

It was so late when we reached Gastford, that we had to rouse the ostler before I could get Lilith attended to. I bathed the injured leg, of which the shoulder seemed wrenched;

and having fed her, but less plentifully than usual, I left her to her repose. In the morning she was considerably better, but I resolved to leave her where she was, and, sending a messenger for Styles to come and attend to her, I hired a gig, and went to call on my new friend the rector of Umberden.

I told him all that had happened, and where I had left the volume. He said he would have a chest made in which to secure the whole register, and, meanwhile, would himself go to the church and bring that volume home with him. It is safe enough now, as any one may find who wishes to see it—though the old man has long passed away.

Lilith remained at Gastford a week before I judged it safe for her to come home. The injury, however, turned out to be a not very serious one.

Why should I write of my poor mare—but that she was once hers all for whose hoped perusal I am writing this? No, there is even a better reason: I shall never, to all my eternity, forget, even if I should never see her again,

which I do not for a moment believe, what she did for me that evening. Surely she deserves to appear in her own place in my story!

Of course I was exercised in my mind as to who had sent me the warning. There could be no more doubt that I had hit what it intended, and had possibly preserved the register from being once more tampered with. I could think only of one. I have never had an opportunity of inquiring, and for her sake I should never have asked the question, but I have little doubt it was Clara. Who else could have had a chance of making the discovery, and at the same time would have cared to let me know it? Also she would have cogent reason for keeping such a part in the affair a secret. Probably she had heard her father informing Geoffrey; but he might have done so with no worse intention than had informed his previous policy.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### YET ONCE.

I AM drawing my story to a close. Almost all that followed bears so exclusively upon my internal history, that I will write but one incident more of it. I have roamed the world, and reaped many harvests. In the deepest agony I have never refused the consolations of Nature or of Truth. I have never knowingly accepted any founded in falsehood, in forgetfulness, or in distraction. Let such as have no hope in God drink of what Lethe they can find; to me it is a river of Hell and altogether abominable. I could not be content even to forget my sins. There can be but one deliverance from them, namely, that God and they

should come together in my soul. In his presence I shall serenely face them. Without him I dare not think of them. With God a man can confront anything; without God, he is but the withered straw which the sickle of the reaper has left standing on a wintry field. But to forget them would be to cease and begin anew, which to one aware of his immortality is a horror.

If comfort profound as the ocean has not yet overtaken and infolded me, I see how such may come—perhaps will come. It must be by the enlarging of my whole being in truth, in God, so as to give room for the storm to rage, yet not destroy; for the sorrow to brood, yet not kill; for the sunshine of love to return after the east wind and black frost of bitterest disappointment; for the heart to feel the uttermost tenderness while the arms go not forth to embrace; for a mighty heaven of the unknown, crowded with the stars of endless possibilities, to dawn when the sun of love has vanished, and the moon of its memory is too ghastly to give any light: it is comfort such and thence

that I think will one day possess me. Already has not its aurora brightened the tops of my snow-covered mountains? And if yet my valleys lie gloomy and forlorn, is not light on the loneliest peak a sure promise of the coming day?

Only once again have I looked in Mary's face. I will record the occasion, and then drop my pen.

About five years after I left home, I happened in my wanderings to be in one of my favourite Swiss valleys—high and yet sheltered. I rejoiced to be far up in the mountains, yet behold the inaccessible peaks above me—mine, though not to be trodden by foot of mine—my heart's own, though never to yield me a moment's outlook from their lofty brows; for I was never strong enough to reach one mighty summit. It was enough for me that they sent me down the glad streams from the cold bosoms of their glaciers—the offspring of the sun and the snow; that I too beheld the stars to which they were nearer than I.

One lovely morning I had wandered a good

way from the village—a place little frequented by visitors, where I had a lodging in the house of the syndic—when I was overtaken by one of the sudden fogs which so frequently render those upper regions dangerous. There was no path to guide me back to my temporary home, but, a hundred yards or so beneath where I had been sitting, lay that which led down to one of the best known villages of the canton, where I could easily find shelter. I made haste to descend.

After a couple of hours' walking, during which the fog kept following me, as if hunting me from its lair, I at length arrived at the level of the valley, and was soon in one of those large hotels which in Summer are crowded as bee-hives, and in Winter forsaken as a ruin. The season for travellers was drawing to a close, and the house was full of homeward-bound guests.

For the mountains will endure but a season of intrusion. If travellers linger too long within their hospitable gates, their humour changes, and, with fierce winds and snow and bitter

sleet, they will drive them forth, preserving their Winter privacy for the bosom friends of their mistress, Nature. Many is the Winter since those of my boyhood which I have spent amongst the Alps; and in such solitude I have ever found the negation of all solitude, the one absolute Presence. David communed with his own heart on his bed and was still—there finding God: communing with my own heart in the Winter-valleys of Switzerland I found at least what made me cry out: "Surely this is the house of God; this is the gate of heaven!" I would not be supposed to fancy that God is in mountains, and not in plains—that God is in the solitude, and not in the city: in any region harmonious with its condition and necessities, it is easier for the heart to be still, and in its stillness to hear the still small voice.

Dinner was going on at the *table-d'hôte.* It was full, but a place was found for me in a bay-window. Turning to the one side, I belonged to the great world, represented by the Germans, Americans, and English, with a Frenchman and

Italian here and there, filling the long table; turning to the other, I knew myself in a temple of the Most High, so huge that it seemed empty of men. The great altar of a mighty mountain rose, massy as a world, and ethereal as a thought, into the upturned gulf of the twilight air—its snowy peak, ever as I turned to look, mounting up and up to its repose. I had been playing with my own soul, spinning it between the sun and the moon, as it were, and watching now the golden and now the silvery side, as I glanced from the mountain to the table, and again from the table to the mountain, when all at once I discovered that I was searching the mountain for something—I did not know what. Whether any tones had reached me, I cannot tell;—a man's mind may, even through his senses, be marvellously moved without knowing whence the influence comes; —but there I was searching the face of the mountain for something, with a want which had not begun to explain itself. From base to peak my eyes went flitting and resting and wandering again upwards. At last they reached the snowy

crown, from which they fell into the infinite blue beyond. Then, suddenly, the unknown something I wanted was clear. The same moment I turned to the table. Almost opposite was a face—pallid, with parted lips and fixed eyes—gazing at me. Then I knew those eyes had been gazing at me all the time I had been searching the face of the mountain. For one moment they met mine and rested; for one moment, I felt as if I must throw myself at her feet, and clasp them to my heart; but she turned her eyes away, and I rose and left the house.

The mist was gone, and the moon was rising. I walked up the mountain path towards my village. But long ere I reached it the sun was rising. With his first arrow of slenderest light, the tossing waves of my spirit began to lose their white tops, and sink again towards a distant calm; and ere I saw the village from the first point of vision, I had made the following verses. They are the last I will set down.

I know that I cannot move thee
  To an echo of my pain,
Or a thrill of the storming trouble
  That racks my soul and brain ;

That our hearts through all the ages
  Shall never sound in tune ;
That they meet no more in their cycles
  Than the parted sun and moon.

But if ever a spirit flashes
  Itself on another soul,
One day, in thy stillness, a vapour
  Shall round about thee roll ;

And the lifting of the vapour
  Shall reveal a world of pain,
Of frosted suns, and moons that wander
  Through misty mountains of rain.

Thou shalt know me for one live instant—
  Thou shalt know me—and yet not love :
I would not have thee troubled,
  My cold, white-feathered dove !

I would only once come near thee—
  Myself, and not my form ;
Then away in the distance wander,
  A slow-dissolving storm.

The vision should pass in vapour,
  That melts in æther again ;
Only a something linger—
  Not pain, but the shadow of pain.

And I should know that thy spirit
  On mine one look had sent;
And glide away from thy knowledge,
  And try to be half-content.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### CONCLUSION.

THE ebbing tide that leaves bare the shore swells the heaps of the central sea. The tide of life ebbs from this body of mine, soon to lie on the shore of life like a stranded wreck; but the murmur of the waters that break upon no strand is in my ears; to join the waters of the infinite life, mine is ebbing away.

Whatever has been his will is well—grandly well—well even for that in me which feared, and in those very respects in which it feared that it might not be well. The whole being of me past and present shall say: It is infinitely well, and I would not have it otherwise. Rather than it should not be as it is, I would go back to the world and this body of which I

grew weary, and encounter yet again all that met me on my journey. Yes—final submission of my will to the All-will—I would meet it *knowing what was coming.* Lord of me, Father of Jesus Christ, will this suffice? Is my faith enough yet? I say it, not having beheld what thou hast in store—not knowing what I shall be—not even absolutely certain that thou art—confident only that, if thou be, such thou must be.

The last struggle is before me. But I have passed already through so many valleys of death itself, where the darkness was not only palpable, but choking and stinging, that I cannot greatly fear that which holds but the shadow of death. For what men call death, is but its shadow. Death never comes near us; it lies behind the back of God; he is between it and us. If he were to turn his back upon us, the death which no imagination can shadow forth, would lap itself around us, and we should be—we should not know what.

At night I lie wondering how it will feel; and, but that God will be with me, I would

rather be slain suddenly, than lie still and await the change. The growing weakness, ushered in, it may be, by long agony; the alienation from things about me, while I am yet amidst them; the slow rending of the bonds which make this body a home, so that it turns half alien, while yet some bonds unsevered hold the live thing fluttering in its worm-eaten cage ——but God knows me and my house, and I need not speculate or forebode. When it comes, death will prove as natural as birth. Bethink thee, Lord——nay, thou never forgettest. It is because thou thinkest and feelest that I think and feel; it is on thy deeper consciousness that mine ever floats; thou knowest my frame, and rememberest that I am dust: do with me as thou wilt. Let me take centuries to die if so thou willest, for thou wilt be with me. Only if an hour should come when thou must seem to forsake me, watch me all the time, lest self-pity should awake, and I should cry that thou wast dealing hardly with me. For when thou hidest thy face, the world is a corpse, and I am a live soul fainting within it.

* * * * * * *

Thus far had I written, and was about to close with certain words of Job, which are to me like the trumpet of the resurrection, when the news reached me that Sir Geoffrey Brotherton was dead. He leaves no children, and the property is expected to pass to a distant branch of the family. Mary will have to leave Moldwarp Hall.

* * * * * * *

I have been up to London to my friend Marston—for it is years since Mr. Coningham died. I have laid everything before him, and left the affair in his hands. He is so confident in my cause, that he offers, in case my means should fail me, to find what is necessary himself; but he is almost as confident of a speedy settlement.

And now, for the first time in my life, I am about—shall I say, to court society? At least I am going to London, about to give and receive invitations, and cultivate the acquaintance of those whose appearance and conversation attract me.

I have not a single relative, to my knowledge, in the world, and I am free, beyond question, to leave whatever property I have, or may have, to whomsoever I please.

My design is this : if I succeed in my suit, I will offer Moldwarp to Mary for her lifetime. She is greatly beloved in the county, and has done much for the labourers, nor upon her own lands only. If she had the full power she would do yet better. But of course it is very doubtful whether she will accept it. Should she decline it, I shall try to manage it myself—leaving it to her, with reversion to the man, whoever he may be, whom I shall choose to succeed her.

What sort of man I shall endeavour to find, I think my reader will understand. I will not describe him, beyond saying that he must above all things be just, generous, and free from the petty prejudices of the country gentleman. He must understand that property involves service to every human soul that lives or labours upon it—the service of the elder brother to his less burdened yet more enduring and more helpless

brothers and sisters; that for the lives of all such he has in his degree to render account. For surely God never meant to uplift any man *at the expense* of his fellows; but to uplift him that he might be strong to minister, as a wise friend and ruler, to their highest and best needs—first of all by giving them the justice which will be recognized as such by him before whom a man *is* his brother's keeper, and becomes a Cain in denying it.

Lest Lady Brotherton, however, should like to have something to give away, I leave my former will as it was. It is in Marston's hands.

* * * * * * *

Would I marry her now, if I might? I cannot tell. The thought rouses no passionate flood within me. Mighty spaces of endless possibility and endless result open before me. Death is knocking at my door.——

No—no; I will be honest, and lay it to no half reasons, however wise.—I would rather meet her then first, when she is clothed in that new garment called by St. Paul the spiritual

body. That, Geoffrey has never touched; over that he has no claim.

But if the loveliness of her character should have purified his, and drawn and bound his soul to hers?

Father, fold me in thyself. The storm, so long still, awakes; once more it flutters its fierce pinions. Let it not swing itself aloft in the air of my spirit. I dare not think, not merely lest thought should kindle into agony, but lest I should fail to rejoice over the lost and found. But my heart is in thy hand. Need I school myself to bow to an imagined decree of thine? Is it not enough that, when I shall know a thing for thy will, I shall then be able to say: Thy will be done? It is not enough; I need more. School thou my heart so to love thy will that in all calmness I leave to think what may or may not be its choice, and rest in its holy self.

* * * * * * *

She has sent for me. I go to her. I will not think beforehand what I shall say.

Something within tells me that a word from

her would explain all that sometimes even now seems so inexplicable as hers. Will she speak that word? Shall I pray her for that word? I know nothing. The pure Will be done!

THE END.

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